

WORLD CHANGER

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Mark J Musser Books
2019*

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Cover art: Image ID – 22300078 – Benjamin Goode

First printing: 2014

Printed in the United States of America

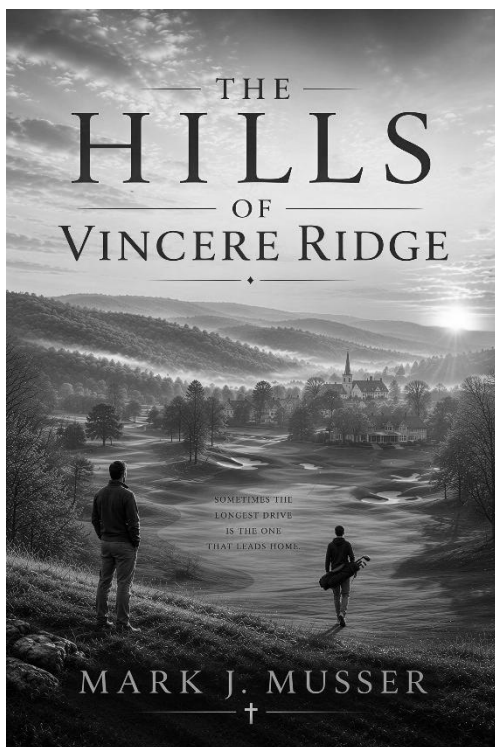
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Trade paperback -- ISBN: 9781798771921

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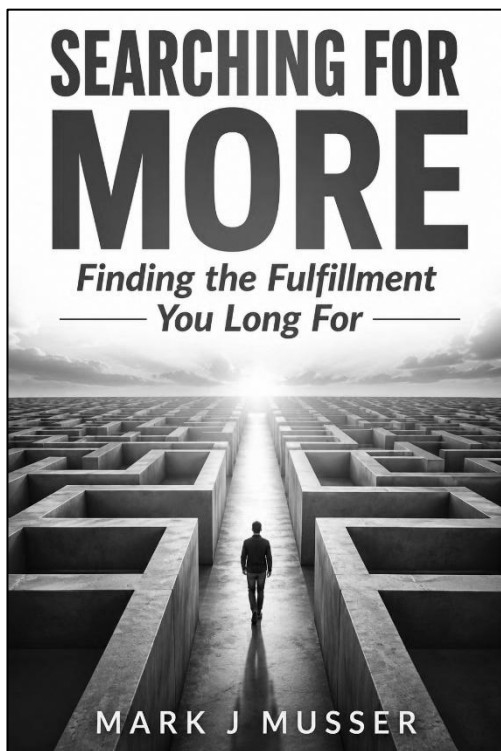
The Lord who guides my steps and my
wife and son who put up with my missteps.

What happens when you stop seeing labels and start seeing people? Can conviction and compassion exist together without either being compromised?



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SALT AND LIGHT

In November of 2003, I was preparing to marry an incredible woman who I love deeply. However, our road to marriage had one forty pound road block. Her five year old son, Kyle, who didn't quite know what to make of me. So as you can imagine, I had one over-riding goal leading up to marriage--win over the boy.

Perhaps that sounds a little bit strange to you. There I was, a man in his thirties, a solid relationship with the Lord, and yet I'm worried about what a five year-old thinks.

Nevertheless, that's how it was. So as I am driving out for a pre-marriage visit, twelve hours in the car, I'm pondering over this, praying about this, deciding what to say, how to act, etc.

When I arrived, in a flash of inspiration, I decided Kyle

and I needed to take a trip to Chuck E Cheese. Some people call that place a crooked casino for kids, but I called it my shot to win over the boy.

When we got there, the parking lot was full, so I had to park at the far end of the lot. I assumed that my soon to be son, like any five year-old, would bolt for the entrance and immediately start begging for tokens. That is not what happened.

Instead, Kyle bent down and started rubbing his knees. Confused by this, I asked, “What are you doing, buddy?”

Making a face that mixed incredibly cute with incredibly pathetic, he looked back up at me. Then, with a slight whine in his voice, he let out, “My legs hurt.”

Well, we’d only gone about four feet, so I said, “You’re okay. It’s not that far.”

Again, I got that face, accompanied by “My legs hurt.”

Now, even someone as thick as me could figure out what was going on. He wanted to be carried, so I picked him up and toted him in. Upon getting inside, I put him down, and we got our tokens. Incredibly, as soon as the tokens were in hand, wonder of wonders, his legs were fine. He was running from game to game. “This one now. This one.”

I thought, “What a miraculous recovery!? Someone call *It’s a Miracle!*” Unfortunately, his leg condition was only

in temporary remission because, when we stepped outside to leave, the face returned, “My legs hurt.”

During this same time period, I was listening to a sermon series by Dr. Joseph Stowell, the former president of Moody Bible Institute. The series centered on the tremendous change our culture has undergone in the last fifty plus years.

Stowell pointed out that in 1960 Christians were in the mainstream of the culture, but today we’ve been yanked from the mainstream and taken out back behind the woodshed. Stowell, then, began cataloguing all the things that have happened in the last several decades that has turned a once Christian nation into what we have today.

He was speaking with such conviction and passion about it that I had an almost irresistible urge to pick up the phone, call my mom and dad, and say, “Mom, Dad, how could you let this happen? Where were you? What were you doing to stop this?”

I wanted to get a hold of anyone who was an evangelical Christian during the 70’s and 80s and say, “How could you let this happen? What were you doing to stop this? Look at the culture you left me!”

Then it hit me. Like the proverbial ton of bricks. Boom! The boy. Kyle. What will he say to me in twenty-five years when he’s thirty? What will he say to me when he’s

holding his tired little boy in his arms?

If I do nothing, if the culture keeps on its downward slide, will he come to me and say, “Dad, how could you let this happen? What were you doing to stop this? Look at the culture you left me to raise this boy in”?

What about your children? What about the children you see sitting in the pews in church on Sunday? What about the children scampering around your neighborhood, roller-blading in your community’s parks, playing on your child’s baseball team? What about them? What about when they are thirty? What about when they are holding their children in their arms? Can you hear the words, “Mom, Dad, how could you let this happen? What were you doing?”

What will our response be? “Well, I tried to be a good person. I went to church every Sunday.” That answer will sound very hollow in twenty-five years.

Make no mistake. World changers are desperately needed. Those who seek to go beyond “ordinary citizens” are in short supply. What about you? Are you up to the challenge?

What’s a World Changer to Do?

Psalm 11:3 asks an important question for our day and age. *If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous*

do? That's a great question. When the foundations are gone, when right and wrong are seen as matters of choice, when absolute truth becomes relative, when objective God is replaced with subjective man, what can the righteous do?

I think many of us want to do something, but what? The problem seems so big, and we seem so small. What can we do? What can we do when opening the doors to the church is no longer enough? What can we do when Christ and His message are seen as unnecessary, out of touch, and out of date? What's a world changer to do?

We must have real answers for the next generation. What will we say tomorrow when the children of today come to us with their children? What do we tell them when they ask, "Where were you? What were you doing?"

Check out the following quotes. I think they'll give us a good starting point.

The famous missionary E. Stanley Jones once wrote, "How often we put religion into a sacred day, Sunday, and a sacred place, the church, and leave it there--embalmed!"

Author and pastor, Robert Coleman writes, "Unless opportunity is provided for outreach, the group can stagnate in self-contentment, and eventually fossilize into nothing more than a mutual admiration society."

The founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley,

told his followers, “Observe: it is not your business to preach so many times and to take care of this or that society, but to save as many souls as you can, to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord.”

Joe Stowell aptly points out, “If we don’t actively engage the world on [Jesus’] behalf, we have fallen short of following Him. For if you follow Him, He will ultimately take you right to the needs of those around you. It is obvious, even to the most casual observer, that He came to effectively engage His world, not to hibernate with His chosen few.”

These men have it right. It can no longer be “church as usual.” We must seek to engage and change the world as Christ engaged and changed the world.

Did not Jesus leave the comfort of Heaven to enter a world very antithetical to His message? Indeed, Jesus entered a world that was not looking for Him and was not at all interested in His message.

What did He do in that situation, within that culture? And what did He tell His followers to do? The answer is found in Matthew 5:13-16, where Jesus boldly stated,

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful

again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world—like a city on a mountain glowing in the night for all to see. Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine out for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

Salt the World

The first thing Jesus says is, "You are the salt of the earth." What does that mean? Well, salt has some interesting qualities, though if you were to look at it, you might not think so. It doesn't look like much. It's not big, or bright, or colorful. If you dropped some on the floor, it would be almost unnoticeable. Yet, salt has many vitally important properties.

First, it preserves food. In days before refrigeration, this quality was incredibly important. Unsalted meat would quickly spoil. Salt, then, was crucial to protecting meat. However, if the meat that needed preserving was on the table, and the salt was in the cupboard, then the meat would go bad. For salt to be effective, it must be poured onto, and worked into, the meat.

Second, salt flavors food. I don't believe I am alone in

thinking that without salt McDonalds' French fries would taste like yellow cardboard. Yet, with a liberal dousing of salt, those same fries are quite tasty (and addictive). The salt makes all the difference. However, if the French fries are on the plate, and the salt is in the cupboard, then the fries will remain flavorless. The salt must be poured onto the fries.

Third, salt helps heal wounds. Before the miracles of modern medicine, salt was widely used as a healing agent. Roman soldiers were often paid in salt—called a “salarium” which is where we get our word for “salary”—and they would use it to heal their many battle wounds. However, if the wounded soldier was in the tent, and his salt was left on the battlefield, the untreated wound could get infected and diseased. The salt must be poured into the wound.

Finally, salt creates a thirst. We all know that salty foods make us thirsty. Try to eat a bag of salty potato chips without drinking something, or consider what happens when you swallow salt-water. You find yourself racing for the nearest spigot or water fountain. Salt creates thirst, one that must be satisfied.

Where's the Salt?

If Christ had stayed in Heaven, what good would that

have done? Praise Him! He left Heaven and came to earth to pour Himself out on us. Likewise, if we, as Christians—which means “Christ ones”—stay in the church and spend all our time with fellow Christians, what good does that do? Christians in a church are the same as salt in the cupboard. We must go out into the world. We must be where the lost are and involve ourselves in their lives.

Dennis Kinlaw, an Asbury Seminary professor, tells a story about growing up in rural North Carolina during the depression. It was Dennis’ job as a young boy to rub salt into the meat his father brought home from hunting. He would rub salt into the meat until his young muscles ached. Finally, when it was thoroughly salted, he would hang it up in the storehouse.

One day company arrived, so Dennis’ mother asked him to get some pork out of the storehouse. Dennis ran out, got a piece of pork off of a hook, and brought it into the kitchen. After he laid it on his mother’s cutting board, he was shooed out of the room. The boy was just about out the front door when he heard his mother yell, “Dennis!”

Young Dennis knew from experience that whenever his mother screamed his name like that he was in trouble, so he slunk his way to the kitchen and stood in the doorway afraid to go in.

Looking up at his mother from the doorway, he noticed

she was not glaring at him but rather staring down at the meat. Dennis quickly dropped his gaze and noticed something unusual. He would say that it was the first time in his life he ever saw meat move. Stepping closer, he noticed maggots pouring out of the slice his mother had made into the pork.

Dennis thought for sure he was going to get it. But all Mom said was, “Not enough salt, Dennis. Not enough salt.”

Now, our tendency is to want to blame Hollywood, or liberal schooling, or TV, for the decay of our culture. But maybe, just maybe, the *real* problem is “not enough salt.”¹

As Christians, when we enter a culture and involve ourselves in the lives of those around us, we should naturally create a thirst for the things of God. If that’s the case, we should be asking ourselves: How thirsty for the things of God am I making the lost in my community? If we feel the world is decaying around us, the problem may very well be “not enough salt.”

Light the World

In the remainder of Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus says, “You’re not just to be the salt of the earth but the light of the world as well.” Notice that Jesus says we are to be a light, not to each other, but to the world. Jesus adds, “Everyone should see this light. Put yourself on a stand. Let your good deeds

shine for all to see.”

Don’t miss what Jesus is trying to convey. He’s doesn’t say, “Put yourself on a stand for all to *hear*.” He says, “For all to *see*.”

In our times, people don’t want to hear about Jesus. They are disinterested. Talking about Jesus gets a yawn and a “if that works for you great, I’m living my own life.” It was no different for Jesus. When He came to earth, He didn’t have a single follower. No one was interested in Him or His message. In Luke 4, the first time Jesus is recorded preaching, the people are so incensed by His message that they try to throw Him off a cliff!

In a Christ-less culture, words cannot be the first wave of attack. This is why Jesus ate with tax-collectors, loved people, and healed the sick. He created a thirst for the things of God. He let His light shine out for all to see, and people were drawn to that light. Do people need to hear the message of Christ? Absolutely. But they won’t hear it until they can see it. Look at what John 1:1-5,14 say:

In the beginning, the Word already existed. He was with God and He was God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that He didn’t make. Life itself was in Him, and this life gives light to

everyone. The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it...So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.

This is why Jesus came to earth, to shine a light in this dark place for all to see. John doesn't say, "We *heard* about His glory." No, he says, "We have *seen* His glory." With this in mind, let me ask you a few questions. If you were to light a candle in your bedroom right now, how dark would the room have to get to make that candle go out?

Would you need to turn out all the lights? Would you need to cover all the windows? Would that make the candle go out? Of course not. Darkness, even complete darkness, cannot put out the candle. In fact, the darker the room, the brighter the candle will seem.

A few decades ago a young American Christian traveled to Crete to hear a famous World War II Greek general speak about Jesus. The old general spoke for three hours. Now, even if you're famous, after three hours of speaking, people are ready for you to be quiet. So when the general finished and asked, "Does anyone have any questions?" No one said a

word...except the American.

This young man, throughout his life, would always raise his hand when someone would ask “Does anyone have any questions?” When the teacher or lecturer acknowledged him, he would say “Yeah, I have a question. What’s the meaning of life?” What usually followed was some laughter, and then everyone would get up to leave. As you can guess, when the Greek general acknowledged the American, this young man instinctively replied, “Yeah, I have a question. What’s the meaning of life?”

Everyone chuckled and began to leave. But the general raised his hand, motioning for everyone to sit down. “That’s a good question, let me show you.” With that, everyone gave the young American a dirty look and sat back down.

Meanwhile, the military man had reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. Opening his wallet, he slid out a small circular mirror. Holding it up, the general said, “When I was a young boy during World War I, I used to go out exploring after planes bombed the countryside.”

“One day,” the old war hero continued, “as I was walking, I came across a bomb crater with a mangled motorcycle in it. Part of the motorcycle’s side-view mirror was shattered, so I took a piece and sanded it until it was perfectly round. I then would try to catch the sunlight with that mirror

and shine it in dark places. I would go home and catch the sunlight coming through a window. I would try to direct the light to a dark corner of the room, a part of the room I knew the sunlight had never touched.”

“You see, that is the meaning of life,” the general continued. “Our life is to reflect God’s glory into the dark places. Places filled with people who have never seen the light.”

With quick movements, the wily speaker caught a ray of sunlight pouring through a window and angled the beam so that it struck the American right in the eyes. The general asked again, “Do you have any other questions?”

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul tells us, *and all of us have had that veil removed, so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord.*

As Christians, we need to be asking ourselves, “How brightly am I shining for God in the world?” If we were created to be reflectors of God’s glory, then there better be some “shine” coming off us. There is no doubt that God’s glory shines wondrously bright, so if what we reflect is dull and pale, whose fault is that?

Entering the World

As children of God, we are connected to the ultimate

power source. Yet if we spend all our time shining in the church, what does that do for those living in darkness? The roof of the church becomes the basket that hides our light from the world.

It was only when Jesus came and lived on earth that we got to experience the light of His glory. Christ Almighty was willing to leave His power and position and become a lowly servant. Christ the King was willing to leave His majestic surroundings, so He could shine His light in a dark world. Christ, the Author of Life, was willing to leave His eternal home, so that He could pour Himself out on a lost world.

Today, we must do the same. We must be willing to go out and meet a Christ-less culture head on. We must be willing to step out into the world, into the culture—not to become like it—but to pour out our salt to preserve, to flavor, to heal, and to create a thirst for the things of God. We must be willing to step out and let our light shine, let people see our good deeds and be drawn to Christ. That’s changing the world one person at a time!

The Psalmist asked *if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?* The answer: We do as Jesus did. What other choice do we have?

Can you picture your children coming to you with their children in tow and asking, “How could you let this happen?”

Where were you? What were you doing?”

Don't you want to be able to answer like this? “Oh my child, I poured myself out on this world. I stood up for Christ and let my light shine. I sought to be a world changer and do all that God asked of me. Now, it's your turn. Follow me, as I followed Christ.”

Twenty-five years from now that will be the only answer worth giving.

Are You Ready for the Next Step?

In Joseph Stowell's amazing book, *The Trouble with Jesus*, he writes these words, “Are you ready to change your mind about what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus...to repent of a life focused on your own agendas and start the wonderful adventure of a life lived according to His intentions? Will you join me in making a difference for Jesus in your world by committing your heart, energy, and resources to the power of taking [Christ] to needy hearts that cross your path every day? Where and with whom will you start?”²

Not sure where you should start? Here are some ideas:

- Begin praying today and ask God to mold you into a world changer. Let Him use you as salt and light in the world
- Start walking around your neighborhood praying for

your neighbors. Ask God to open your eyes to see where you can make a difference right on your own street

- Learn your spiritual gifts. Seek to understand how God has shaped you to serve Him. Ask your pastor if your church has a class on spiritual gifts
- What passions has God placed on your heart? To work with children, youth, the elderly? To clean, to sew, to write? Understand the desires God has put on your heart and get involved in a local church or ministry that needs people with those passions
- Make a list of three to five friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors who don't know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Place that list where you will see it often and pray for those people whenever you see the list

THINK IT THROUGH QUESTIONS

It's easy to blame "the world" for the problems in our culture, but how has a lack of salt and light contributed to our world's spiritual condition?

The Greek General said we are to be mirrors that reflect God's glory into dark places. How brightly are you and your church reflecting God's glory?

What can you begin to do today, so that you will have answers for the children of tomorrow? What are some ways you can be salt and light in your community starting today?

BRIDGE BUILDING 101

I want you to close your eyes and picture a beautiful, tropical island. Imagine yourself walking along a white sandy beach. Feel the warmth of the sand between your toes. Listen to the soft lapping of waves as they wash against the shoreline. Catch the gentle breeze as it wisps through your hair. Bathe in the sunlight that is pouring over your body. Rejoice in the quiet serenity as you walk this beach in solitude.

Doesn't that sound wonderful? I am sure that many of us dream of living on just such an island. Island living seems so peaceful, so serene, so undisturbed, and largely disconnected from the "real world."

For centuries, the residents of Prince Edward Island lived such a life. The island was often described as "two huge

beaches separated by potato fields.” It was a beautiful and tranquil place. The islanders were distanced from the chaos of the real world by nine miles of ocean. Without a bridge to the island, you could not drive there or drive back.

But in 1997, all of that started to change. After a bitter and dividing referendum, construction began on a nine mile bridge costing nearly one billion dollars. With the completion of the bridge, the island was suddenly flooded with tourists. To the long-time residents of Prince Edward, who were not used to such disruptions, these new visitors were unsettling and unwanted. The island suddenly became divided.

Some fiercely opposed having to deal with all these new people, others saw it as a way to create new jobs, new businesses, and new income, as well as a welcome end to incredibly long waits for the island ferry. With the completion of the bridge, says Robert Lewis in his book *The Church of Irresistible Influence*, only one thing is certain, the island, for good or bad, will never be the same.

Robert Lewis goes on to make the following analogy. He writes,

“On an island the church is always lost. Movement, by necessity is always circular, around itself and never in the mostly straight line of an on-going

vision from God. Island living is sometimes monotonous, but it is capriciously comfortable and safe...then someone, some well-meaning, but dangerous dreamer, has the audacity to introduce a church referendum: To build a bridge. To go out there. All the way to them. ‘Them’ is suddenly here. And here can be there. Such a connection will bring with it change, challenges, and yes, conflicts. Most church people instinctively know: a bridge changes everything.”³

This is exactly what happened when Jesus took on flesh and entered time and space. He came into a world that had a distinctly “island mentality” and set forth a referendum. Look again at what He has to say in Matthew 5:13-16. He gives a blueprint of what the church should be:

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world—like a city on a mountain glowing in the night for all to see. Don’t hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine out

for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

But I Like My Island

It’s very easy to stay in our comfort zone, our little island, and simply shout out to a lost world, pointing out all its many faults. But to step out of that comfort zone, to leave the island, and to engage the world, now that makes a difference. That’s why John pleaded with his readers in 1 John 3:18, *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.*

Jesus puts it like this in Luke 9:23, *“If any of you wants to be My followers, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross daily, and follow Me.”*

Wow! That’s pretty hard core. Jesus is basically saying, “You must forget about life on your own little island and follow Me in making a bridge to the world. A bridge constructed from your good deeds, your love, and your Spirit-filled life. No more living life for yourself. From now on, you must be salt, pouring yourselves onto the world around you. From now on, you must be light, placing yourself on a stand and shining out for all to see.”

Remember John 1:14 from the previous chapter? So

the Word became human and lived here among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.

In chapter one, we said this is why Jesus came. God didn't shout from the heavens, "You're forgiven. Go and sin no more." He sent Jesus to earth to be His living proof. Jesus came in the flesh. He was seen. He became a living bridge that men and women could cross to find life, real life.

Is that not the great salvation illustration? We are on one side of a huge divide, and God is on the other. There is no way for us to get across to God, for sin has forged an impassible chasm. But then, Jesus comes. He bridges the chasm by giving His own life for us.

The Lesson We Must Learn

When Jesus came, He reached out to all of Israel and beyond, but He focused on twelve men who would carry on this bridge work. Boy, did Jesus have His work cut out for Him! If anyone had an island mentality, it was these twelve disciples. They vied for positions of privilege within their own little group. They argued over who was the greatest. They sent children away, the sick away, and the desperate away, simply because they didn't want to be bothered by all those needy people, especially when they were so busy jockeying for

position on their own little island.

Because of this, Jesus had to constantly rebuke these men and reteach them over and over again about what it truly meant to be His followers. We're going to look at one of those lessons.

Commonly known as the feeding of the five thousand, it starts with Jesus telling the disciples, "Let's get away from the crowds for a while and rest."

The remainder of the story, from Mark 6:32-44, goes like this:

They left by boat for a quieter spot. But many people saw them leaving, and people from many towns ran ahead along the shore and met them as they landed.

A vast crowd was there as He stepped from the boat, and He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He taught them many things.

Late in the afternoon, His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a desolate place, and it is getting late. Send the crowds away to the nearby farms and

villages so they can buy themselves some food.”

But Jesus said, “You feed them.”

“With what?” They asked. “It would take a small fortune to buy food for all this crowd!”

“How much do you have?” He asked. “Go and find out.”

They came back and reported, “We have five loaves of bread and two fish.”

Then Jesus told the crowd to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat in groups of fifty or a hundred. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked upward toward heaven, and asked God’s blessing on the food.

Breaking the loaves into pieces, He kept giving the bread and the fish to the disciples to give to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they picked up twelve baskets of leftover bread and fish. Five thousand men had eaten from those five

loaves.

Reading this story, it is tempting to focus on the miracle. However, I want to place our focus elsewhere. I want us to hone in on the lesson Jesus is teaching the disciples. Look at what we see first. We see Jesus having deep compassion for a group of tired and hungry people. People described as “sheep without a shepherd.” They do need a shepherd. They do need hope. They do need love. Instinctively, Jesus stops to meet those needs.

In other words, He begins construction of a bridge. This, unfortunately, is *not* the response of the twelve disciples. What do they do? They come to Jesus and say, “Jesus, it’s late. Jesus, we’re tired and hungry, and now these people are complaining about being tired and hungry. Send them away.”

The disciples are saying, in essence, “Jesus, we want to isolate and not engage; we want to retreat and not influence; we’re not interested in serving them. Jesus you meet our needs, and send these people away to meet their own needs.”

This is the disciples’ mindset, so I love what Jesus says next. He looks the disciples right in the eye and says, “You feed them.” I wish I could have been there to see their faces. Now, the lesson is about to begin.

Jesus continues, “You feed them. You serve. You reach.

You influence. You move out from under your own needs and start meeting the needs of others.”

How do the disciples respond to this challenge from Jesus? How do they respond to Jesus’ command to be a bridge? They say, “Whatchu talkin’ ‘bout Willis!?”

Or in non-*Different Strokes* language, “Whoa, Jesus! This problem is too big. It’s beyond our ability. It’s beyond our resources. It simply cannot be done!”

Have you been there?

Asking the Wrong Questions

Don’t we tend to react the same way? We look at the problems in our community, in our state, in our nation, in the world, and think, “What can I do? The problem is so big, and I’m so small!”

We look at the problem with teen pregnancy in this country and ask, “What can little old me do about it?” We look at the problem of pornography in this country and ask, “What can my one church do about it?”

When presented with big problems or big tasks, we respond just like the twelve disciples. “It won’t do any good. The need is too great. The problem is too weighty. The nation is too divided, so why bother!?”

The problem, however, is that we ask the wrong

questions. We ask, “What difference can *I* make?” when we should be asking, “What difference can *Jesus* make through me?”

That’s the question Jesus is going to answer in these next few verses.

Jesus asks the disciples, “How much do you have?” Notice the pronoun *you*. In other words, “What do *you* have among yourselves to solve this problem? Go and find out.” Jesus knows the answer. He knows they don’t have enough, and that’s His point.

The disciples come back and inform Jesus, “We have five loaves of bread and two fish.” In the Gospel of John, we discover that Andrew found a small boy with these five loaves and two fish. Obviously, what they have is way too small to solve this big problem.

But wait a second. Doesn’t the Scripture say there are five thousand men present, plus women and children? So that means there are as many as ten to twelve thousand people there. Do you mean to tell me that out of this entire crowd only that one small boy thought about packing a lunch?

It’s doubtful. Yet, can you imagine the disciples going out among the crowd, “Hey, uh, Jesus wants us to feed all 12,000 of you, how much food have you got?”

“Me? Well, I have a sandwich and some chips, but

what good is that for all these people?”

“Hey, Jesus asked us, uh, to check out the amount of food we have. Um, He wants us to feed everyone here. What do you have?”

“What do I have? I’ve got some water, but it’s just enough for me and my family. What good is that?”

Isn’t that how we react? God says, “I want to use your church to lead ten percent of your community to Myself.”

“What?!?” We respond incredulously. “Do You know how many people are in my community? Do You know the numbers You’re talking about here? How is my little church going to do that?”

Now, obviously, I don’t know what God has in store for you and your church, but this I do know: What God wants to do is bigger than we think.

If we just busy ourselves with stuff we can accomplish on our own, why would we even need God? If the problem before you seems too big, realize this: That’s God’s point! He’s waiting for you to rely on Him, so He can use you to fulfill His amazing will.

You do *not* need the strength to be a world changer. What you do need is to allow God to use His strength through you. But you know what happens. We immediately look at ourselves and our resources and say, “Nope! That’s too big,

and I'm too small. It can't be done." Just like the disciples, just like the people in the crowd, we ask, "What difference can *I* make?" Instead, we should be asking, "What difference can *Jesus* make through me?"

Think of it. In all of that huge crowd, only one person steps forward. To everyone's shame, it's a small boy. I'm sure the crowd was thinking, "Foolish boy! Your little lunch can't even begin to scratch the surface of this problem!"

Oh, but that's all Jesus needs to complete the lesson. That's all Jesus needs to prove His point. All Jesus needed was someone with the faith to believe that what he had, no matter how small, could be used to glorify God and benefit others.

Putting Ourselves in Jesus' Hands

Jesus takes this little meal into His hands. And in His hands, this little bit becomes more than enough. Jesus takes five little loaves and two small fish, looks to heaven, asks for God's blessing, and feeds 12,000 people.

You see, it's not how much or how little we have to offer. It's what it can become when we place it in Jesus' hands. Jesus can take our little bit and make it more than enough. Jesus can take anyone and make that person more than enough to accomplish anything. Jesus can take any church and make it more than enough to overcome the biggest obstacles.

The questions are, as they were for the disciples, will you place yourself in His hands? Will you be a bridge? Will you be salt and light? Are you willing to serve instead of being served? Are you willing to advance instead of retreat? And are you willing to engage instead of isolate? If so, then *anything* is possible.

Giving Proof

Did you happen to notice how many baskets of leftovers there were after Jesus fed all those people? Twelve baskets.

Twelve baskets, by the way, is one basket for each of the faithless disciples. One basket for each person who said, “What? Feed all these people? It can’t be done!” These twelve baskets were visual reminders that it absolutely could be done.

Jesus understands the importance of the visual. It’s why He came in the flesh. Remember, John 1:14 doesn’t say “The Word became spoken.” It says, “The Word became a human being.” John makes it clear that the Word became flesh; we saw Him; we touched Him; we walked and talked with Him.”

Remember also the world that Jesus was working to engage and influence in Bible times. He’s talking to the Jews. If ever there was a group of people with an island mentality, it

was the Jews. They saw themselves as God's chosen ones, as His elect. Everyone else, therefore, was Gentile and unwanted. But here comes Jesus saying to these islanders, "Be salt and get involved with those lost people." Here comes Jesus saying to these isolators, "Be light. Put yourself on a stand and shine out to those living in darkness." Here comes Jesus saying to these retreaters, "What do you mean 'send them away'? You feed them!"

Jesus comes to them and says, "No, no! You weren't chosen to be some club. You weren't chosen to live on an island. You were chosen to be My witnesses. You were chosen to be mirrors that would reflect My glory. You are to be salt and light. You are to love people in the world, not hide from them. You are to build bridges, not burn them."

Look at what James has to say about this in James 2:14 and 17. *Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions?...Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.*

Jesus didn't expect for us to believe in Him by words alone. He became flesh. He showed up. People saw His glory. He did miracles, signs, and wonders. He proved He was the Son of God!

Today, His followers must do the same. We must

prove Jesus is who we say He is. We must prove it by our love, by our actions, and by the bridges we build as we become salt and light to the world.

Are You Ready for the Next Step?

As we bring this section to a close, I want you to think about someone who you know loves you. Have you got that person pictured in your mind?

Now, think about how you know that this person loves you. How has this person shown you love? How has he or she proven it? Surely, this person has proved it in some way. I mean, without the proof, how would you really know that you were loved? It is the same for the people of the world. How can we expect them to discover the love of God without proof?

Is this proof found in your church? Is this proof found in you? Here are some suggestions that might show the world around you some proof.

- Do mowing, weeding, or other yardwork for an elderly couple in your neighborhood
- Send notes of encouragement or friendship to friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors
- Have a BBQ or dinner at your home and invite the neighbors

- When you hear of friends, relatives, associates, or neighbors who have illnesses, tragedies, births, etc., drop off a meal or dessert and as you hand it over offer any other assistance
- Are there single moms in your community? Offer to help with maintenance, child-care, lawn care, etc.
- Call people up and let them know you are praying for them. Ask for prayer requests, then follow up in a week or two
- Volunteer to serve meals at a homeless shelter, group home, etc.
- When new people move into your neighborhood, be the first to stop by and introduce yourself
- Become known as the house where kids are welcome, advice is shared, and a listening ear is always waiting

THINK IT THROUGH QUESTIONS

How guilty have you been of living as an “islander”?

What are some things you can do in order to build a bridge to the lost around you?

When confronted with a difficult problem or seemingly impossible task, we often look to our own abilities and resources for solutions. Why is that the wrong course of action?

Why is it important to move beyond words and lip-service to actually proving our faith with love and good deeds?

How can you “prove it” today?

CAN GOD REALLY USE ME?

In December of 1996, I was your typical twenty-four year old college student preparing to graduate after seven years at West Chester University. Yes, you read that right. Seven years! Anyway, there I was on semester break, waiting to head into my last semester. I couldn't wait for May to roll around. I'd finally be done. (Did I mention it took me seven years?)

Where would I go after college? I had no idea. And what would I do after college? Again, I had no idea. But I'd be done!

My sister, too, was home on college break. Stephanie also would be graduating in May, though she started three years after me. One night, as she was watching TV in her room, I heard her call to me, "Mark, come in here. You have

to see this!”

I remember it like it was yesterday. The program was all about the orphan crisis in Romania. As it progressed, a strange feeling came over me. I turned to my sister and said, “Steph, I think God wants me to go there.”

My sister, in her loving, sisterly way, said, “What? You? Yeah, right.”

“I’m serious.” I continued, undaunted by her annoying little sister ways. “I think God wants me to go there.”

The desire on my heart seemed very real, but then I began to think about it. Surely, it couldn’t be true. Surely, God couldn’t be asking *me* to go to Romania. There must be some mistake. I thought, perhaps, God had sent an angel to give some well-qualified soul the good news that he had been chosen to go to Romania. Somehow, this angel must have gotten lost and confused and ended up in my head by mistake.

I felt completely unqualified for such an adventure. I can’t sing. I’m not musical. My artistic ability consists of stick figures. I’m much more introverted than extroverted, and my net-worth was about \$18.

What could I possibly contribute? To make matters worse, I soon discovered that they speak Romanian in Romania. Not English. Crazy, right?

How was I going to learn Romanian when, after six

years of Spanish classes, I remembered about eight words? A roughly one word per year retention rate is not good! Certainly, this must be some colossal mistake! I'm not qualified to fulfill Jesus' words found in Matthew 5:13-16.

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world—like a city on a mountain glowing in the night for all to see. Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

My first thought was, “I'm not qualified to be salt, Lord. You want me to pour myself out for you? I'm the guy who hides the last Twinkie to make sure I get it.”

“I'm not qualified to be light. You want to put me on a stand to shine? I'm the guy who sits in the back of class because I'm so self-conscious, I think if I sit up front everyone will be staring at the back of my head.”

“I'm not qualified to be a bridge from You to the world.

What will I build it with? Music? I don't think so. Some people are basses. Some people are baritones. I'm a monotone. I can only hit one note, and that note isn't on anyone's chart!"

"What will I build a bridge with? Artistic ability? A blind man could beat me in a tracing contest! What will I build a bridge with? Generous giving? I've got nothing to give! You've picked the wrong person God. You can't use me. I'm not the one You're looking for."

That is exactly where I was in late 1996, and I don't think I'm the only one who has been there. In fact, I think there are many, too many, who are still there. Satan loves to tell us we can't and then help us list all the reasons why.

Look at this quote by Henry Blackaby from his book, *Experiencing God*. "God will never give you an assignment that He will not, at the same time, enable you to accomplish. Don't focus on your talents, abilities, or interests. In determining God's will, that kind of response is self-centered. You need to become more God-centered."⁴

As we discussed in chapter two, it is not about the difference you can make. It is about the difference God can make through you.

Look at what God told Jeremiah in Jeremiah 32:27: "*I am the Lord, the God of all the peoples of the earth. Is anything too hard for me?*"

What is your answer to the Lord's question? Is anything too hard for Him? Your answer to that question is at the heart of what we are talking about.

That is where I was. "Can God use me? Is it actually possible?" If I say, "no," what I'm really saying is: "God is not strong enough to use me!" Can that be true? Is it actually possible that the Almighty is not strong enough to use me? The answer, of course, is that the Lord can do anything.

For us to truly believe God can use us, Henry Blackaby says we must remember four things:

- It's not what I can do, but what God can do through me
- It's not my abilities, but my availability
- There are no excuses, God has qualified us
- God-sized tasks build God-sized faith and trust in the Lord⁵

These four important statements build upon each other. We start with the foundation stone, God Himself. When God is the foundation, then it's not about me or what I can do. It becomes all about God and what He can do. Since it has become all about God and what He can do, then my abilities, or lack of abilities, mean very little. What matters is simply this. Will I make myself available to this Almighty God? Will I allow Him to work through me?

I don't know about you but when answering these kinds of

questions, my first response is to come up with as many excuses as possible. However, since this is all about God and what He can do, how can any excuse be valid?

Can God do anything or not? If He can do anything, then how can I have excuses? If I will just lay my excuses aside and allow the Lord to work through me to accomplish what only He can, I *will* actually become a world changer.

Doubting Moses

I want us to look at a man in the Bible who did not think God could use him. Who was that man? That man was Moses. Maybe you're thinking, "Moses? Are you sure? Isn't Moses one of the biggies in the Old Testament? No one did more for God than Moses, right?"

That's true. Probably no one did more for God in the Old Testament than Moses. Nevertheless, Moses was a man filled with doubt.

To set the stage for our Scripture, remember that Moses was raised in Pharaoh's palace and spent forty years as a prince in Egypt. But he murdered someone, and fearing for his life, he fled to Midian, where he spent the next forty years of his life herding goats.

By the time God grabs Moses' attention through a burning bush, he is an eighty year-old murderer turned goat

herder. Not much of a resume. Which is why this flawed shepherd probably responded as he did in Exodus 3:9-12:

“The cries of the people have reached Me,” [says the Lord.] “And I have seen how the Egyptians have oppressed them with heavy tasks. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You will lead My people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

“But who am I to appear before Pharaoh?” Moses asked God. “How can You expect Me to lead the Israelites out of Egypt?”

Then God told him, “I will be with you. And this will serve as proof that I have sent you: When you have brought the Israelites out of Egypt, you will return here to worship God at this very mountain.”

What’s Moses’ first excuse? “Who am I to appear before Pharaoh?” In other words, Moses is saying, “I’m not qualified for this. I can’t be used to do this. He’s Pharaoh, and I’m a murderer turned goat-herder.”

How does the Lord respond? He says, “I will be with you, Moses. It’s not about what you can do. I will be there. I

will guide. I will provide.”

Now, you’d think God showing up in a burning bush would be enough to convince Moses, but it’s not. You’d think God promising to be by his side would be enough to convince Moses, but it’s not. Moses is not convinced. He continues with excuse after excuse for the next chapter and a half! By the time, we get to our next Scripture in Exodus 4:10-13, Moses is still making excuses.

But Moses pleaded with the Lord, “O Lord, I’m just not a good speaker. I never have been, and I’m not now, even after you have spoken to me. I’m clumsy with words.”

“Who makes mouths?” The Lord asked him. “Who makes people so they can speak or not speak, hear or not hear, see or not see? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and do as I have told you. I will help you speak well, and I will tell you what to say.”

But Moses again pleaded, “Lord, please! Send someone else.”

Moses is on a roll. “I’m not a good speaker. I’m clumsy

with words. Surely, there is someone better qualified. Surely, there is someone who can speak better than I.”

Again, God reassures, “Who makes mouths? I make mouths. I will help you speak well. I will tell you what to say.”

In other words, God is saying, “I will give you the tools necessary to fulfill My will. I am with you. When you need Me, I’ll be there. When you don’t know what to say, I will tell you.”

No Excuses

Like Moses, we are often full of excuses. Meanwhile, God is full of answers. For example, if we say, “God, I don’t have enough time to do this.”

God can turn around and say, “You don’t have enough time? Well, I existed before time began. I’ll find the time for you.”

If we say, “Lord, I don’t have the money to do this or to give to that.”

God can reply, “You don’t have the money? Well, I made the heavens and the earth and everything in them. I own everything. I will provide.”

For every excuse, our Creator has an answer. The answer is Himself. Because, remember, it’s not about what we can do, but what the Lord can do through us. It’s not about our

qualifications and abilities. God has qualified us. We need only make ourselves available.

Eventually, Moses came to believe that God could use him, and the Israelites were led from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. Likewise, when we finally see that God can use us, the people around us will be led from slavery to sin to freedom in Christ.

Once we believe that God *can* use us to do anything, then God *will* use us to change the world one soul at a time!

It's Not About Us

Hugh Bourne was one of two men God used to found a denomination back in 1812. I don't know about you, but when I think of founders, I think of great men and women: multi-talented, mighty, fiery, and a cut above the rest. Yet, listen to this quote about Hugh Bourne. "About this time a morose and melancholy young man, so bashful as is seldom equaled, being in his twenty-seventh year was converted. Hugh Bourne was his name. Although very shy and diffident, he was very powerful in prayer and became a mighty champion for Christ."⁶

Hugh Bourne was actually so shy that he couldn't look anyone in the face during a conversation. If you were standing on his left, he would be looking over to the right or staring

down at the ground.

Though he didn't talk well with people, he was known to pray beautifully to the Lord, so soon people began asking him to preach. However, being "so bashful as is seldom equaled," he repeatedly said, "No!"

Nevertheless, one Sunday, in the summer of 1801, the church he attended was going to be without a preacher, so Hugh reluctantly agreed to preach. He thought only about a dozen or so people would be there, but so many people showed up they had to hold the service outside!

Hugh was so frightened that he actually preached with his hand over his face the entire time. Despite that, God used Hugh to bring people to Christ. In fact, during Bourne's life, the denomination he founded grew by an average of seven people a day with a new church planted every ten days!⁷ That means an average of thirty-six new churches and over 2200 people coming to Christ every year.

God can use us. God will use us. We just need to let Him. Remember, it's not what we can do, but what God can do through us. It's not our ability but our availability. Think back to Chapter Two, all Jesus needed to feed ten to twelve thousand people was one small boy to make himself available and offer his little bit to God's service.

When that little lad handed over his five loaves and two

fish, it was all Jesus needed. The size of the boy's offering didn't matter. It was what our Savior could do with it that mattered. Similarly, Moses' ability to speak or not speak didn't matter to God. It was what He could do through Moses that mattered. Likewise, Hugh Bourne's incredible shyness didn't matter. It was what God could do through a soul surrendered to Him that mattered.

It's so easy to get caught up in the dreaded, "I'm not qualified" syndrome, but our qualifications mean very little to God. The Lord doesn't collect resumes, keep the best ones, and chuck the rest. He doesn't sift through S.A.T. scores and report cards looking for the A students. He doesn't look up our bank statements seeking the richest people to advance His cause.

He doesn't care how smart we are. He doesn't care how talented we are. He doesn't care how good looking we are. He doesn't care how much money we have. No, He pushes all of that stuff aside. He pushes aside everything the world calls important, peers right into our hearts, and asks just one question: Are you willing?

Are you willing? That is all God asks. Nothing more. If Jesus is in our hearts, we are qualified. If the Holy Spirit is dwelling within us, we are qualified. So the only question that remains now is: Are you willing?

To prove this point, let's look at Mark 12:41-44.

Jesus sat near the Temple money box and watched the people put in their money. Many rich people gave large sums of money. Then a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which were worth only a few cents. Calling His followers to Him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow gave more than all those rich people. They gave only what they did not need. This woman is very poor, but she gave all she had; she gave all she had to live on."

In this passage, Jesus goes to the temple with His disciples and simply sits there watching. You can believe that if Jesus has taken the time to sit down and watch, He wants to teach the disciples, and us, a lesson. Sure enough, as the disciples and Jesus rest and observe, here comes rich person after rich person dropping in huge sums of money. I can just see the disciples looking at each other and saying, "Now, there is someone that God can use! Look at all that money. Wow! Imagine what God can do with that!"

Who follows all these rich people? A poor widow. What is her offering? Two coins worth virtually nothing.

Can you hear the disciples scoffing? “Two coins? Why did she even bother!? What can God do with two worthless coins? What can the priests buy with that? This woman should have stayed home and left the small change in her pocket!”

Now, it’s Jesus’ turn. To the disciples complete surprise, Jesus says, “That poor widow gave more than the rest!”

“Huh? She gave two worthless coins. What are you talking about Jesus? How could that possibly be the most?”

“It’s the most,” Jesus replies, “because she was willing to give it all. While those rich people, with whom you’re so impressed, were only willing to give a tiny portion of their wealth.”

What’s the lesson from this?

It’s not how much you have to give. It’s how much of what you have that you’re willing to give. Remember, God’s not checking bank statements. He’s checking willingness. So Jesus condemns those who are willing to give just a small portion, even if the amount is large.

Meanwhile, He praises the one who was willing to give it all, even though the amount is small. That’s what God is concerned about. It’s not how much you have, but how much of what you have that you’re willing to give.

Are you willing? That’s what God wants to know. He doesn’t care if you have one million dollars or one dollar. He

just wants to know: Are you willing? He doesn't care if you are multi-talented or zero-talented. He just wants to know: Are you willing?

Do You Believe It?

I love the picture of Jesus' Triumphal Entry. He is riding a donkey into Jerusalem with hope-filled crowds thronging around Him. Some take off their coats and lay them on the path ahead of Jesus. Others pull palm branches off of the trees and lay them down. All are shouting and cheering. It must have been quite a sight.

A sight the Pharisees wanted to see come quickly to an end. Look at Luke 19:36-40.

Then the crowds spread out their coats on the road ahead of Jesus. As they reached the place where the road started down from the Mount of Olives, all of His followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen.

They shouted joyfully, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven."

*Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus,
“Teacher, tell your disciples to be quiet.”*

*Jesus replied, “I can guarantee that if they are
quiet, the stones will cry out!”*

I don't know about you, but if Jesus can use a rock to proclaim His glory, then surely He can use me. If Jesus can use stones to spread the Good News, then surely I can be used to spread the Good News. If Jesus can enable lifeless things to shout His praises, how much more can He enable us, the people He suffered and died for?

God can use us. God will use us. We just need to believe it.

You know, in the end, I did go to Romania and to my great surprise, the Lord actually used me there. In the end, Moses did go to Egypt and to his great surprise, God actually used that stuttering murderer-turned-goat-herder to lead millions of his countrymen to the Promised Land.

In the end, those twelve disciples who couldn't do anything right, did go into all the world. To their great surprise, their Master used them to build His church. In the end, Hugh Bourne, that man so bashful as is seldom equaled, did stand up for Jesus and to his great surprise, his faithful Father used him

to found a denomination.

There was nothing special about Moses. There was nothing special about the disciples. There was nothing special about Hugh Bourne, and there certainly isn't anything special about me. It simply comes down to: Are you willing?

Are You Ready for the Next Step?

Are you willing to be salt and let God pour you out on a lost world? Are you willing to be light and let God put you on a stand to shine out in the darkness? Are you willing to be a bridge from Christ to the world? Are you willing? If you are, then anything is possible. Do you believe that anything is possible? If so, then it's time to be a world changer. Below are a few "next step" ideas:

- Has God laid something on your heart that you've continually dismissed because it seems too big or too hard? If so, now is the time to revisit it. Begin praying about it and let the Lord lead you
- Schedule a meeting with your pastor. Ask about the biggest needs in the church and see if God may want to use you to fill that need
- Pray this dangerous prayer: Father, I can't be a world changer from my comfort zone, so lead me out of my

comfort zone into a world that desperately needs you

- Sit down with your family around the kitchen table and brainstorm ways you can work together to bless friends, relatives, neighbors, the church, and community

THINK IT THROUGH QUESTIONS

God asked Jeremiah, “Is anything too hard for Me?” It seems like an easy question to answer, but what causes you to doubt?

Moses was full of excuses, but when he put those excuses aside, God worked through him in mighty ways. What could the Lord do through you if you laid your excuses aside?

It all comes down to a question of willingness. What are some things that keep you from allowing God to use you to impact the world?

What could you willingly do this week for Jesus?

THE REASONS WHY

There's the story of a young boy who went to visit a farm. As he looked around this farm, he saw a mother hen and about five of her chicks pecking at the ground. Now, as you know, young boys like to throw rocks, and this little boy thought he had found himself some nice little targets. So picking up a rock, he chucked it at one of the chicks. Missing his target, he quickly bent over to gather another rock. However, when he stood back up to take aim, all the chicks had disappeared.

Where had they gone? As soon as that first rock hit the dirt, the mother hen raised her white-feathered wings up high, and all her furry yellow chicks scurried to her. Quickly closing her wings around the frightened chicks, Mom tucked them

safely away.

That is a great picture of what Jesus meant when He spoke with tears in His eyes about Jerusalem. Weeping in Matthew 23:37, He cried out, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let Me.”*

Jesus tells us that He longs to protect us, to watch over us, to be our shelter, our shield, and our protector. As Christians, we are so very fortunate to know that when the rocks of life are thrown at us, we can run to our Savior. We can head to our Lord for safety.

The same cannot be said for the many that live and work and go to school all around us. Most have no such knowledge of where to go when the rocks of life are thrown in their direction. So what do they do? They turn to alcohol or drugs or prescription meds or porn, hoping those things will help them forget that rocks are being thrown. That is, until the alcohol, drugs, pills, and porn become rocks of their own.

Maybe they plunge head first into a drive for success, or wealth, or fame and that helps them ignore the rocks. That is, until they realize they are just as empty and unfulfilled as before.

Maybe they spiral into depression, or maybe they go

from relationship to relationship trying to find someone who won't let them down. (I speak on this in detail in my book *Searching for More*).

Tens of millions of people are doing these very things while you read, yet we know they will not find the answers they desperately seek. We have the answer. We know where they can find hope, and life, and rest, and comfort. Since we know this, it is our duty to tell them. It is our duty to tell them that everything they need is found in Christ.

We've spent a good deal of time on Matthew 5:13-16. We've looked at the great need our world has for Christ, and how Christians (especially Western ones) haven't done all that much to effectively present Him to the world. We've looked at how the church in America acts like an island that has distanced itself from the world. We've looked at all that God can do through us, and how anything is possible when we make ourselves available to be bridge-builders for God.

Yet, for some reason, we keep clinging to the pew or vegging out on the living room sofa instead of intrepidly venturing out of our comfort zone. I hope and pray that you are different. I hope and pray that you are beginning to believe that God can use you, and you can indeed be a world changer.

If that is right where you are, then you can bet that Satan is starting to pummel you with doubts and excuses

excuses. “Why should you bother? Why should you go through all the time and trouble? Why should you put your plans and agenda aside? Why does it have to be you?”

Let’s answer some of these doubts.

Because Jesus Commanded It

Why should we bother to be world changers? The first answer to that question is: Because Jesus commanded it. Let’s look again at Matthew 5:13-16.

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world – like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

First, notice that Jesus says, “You *are* the salt of the earth.” He doesn’t say, “I think it would be a good idea if you tried to be the salt of the earth.” No, He says, “You *are* the salt

of the earth.” He’s not giving any options here. He’s not playing multiple choice, and He’s not seeking volunteers. He’s simply telling it like it is.

He turns to all who would follow Him and says, “You *are* the salt of the earth. No ifs or ands, so get your butts in gear!”

Now, what does it mean to be salt? We talked somewhat about this in Chapter One. We said that salt is small and almost unnoticeable. Yet, a little bit does a great deal. A little bit of salt in your soup, although unnoticed, adds a great deal of flavor. Salt worked into meat, though unseen, can preserve the meat for months. Salt on popcorn, chips, or pretzels, while tiny in amount, can create a big thirst. So when Jesus commands us to be the salt of the earth, He’s talking about doing the little things that make a big impact.

Smiling and saying “Hi” to people you meet on the street. Just a little thing, but people notice. Not engaging in gossip when someone tells you a juicy tidbit about so-and-so. Just a little thing, but people notice. Not cursing when everyone else does. Again just a little thing, but people notice.

We can do hundreds of little things every day that may potentially make a noticeable impact, giving us an avenue to share the gospel.

For instance, what you say when the line is too long at

Wal-Mart; what you do when the waitress brings you the wrong meal in a restaurant; how you react when someone cuts you off on the road, etc. These are all little things that make a big impact on a watching world.

The Christian research firm, The Barna Group, did a survey comparing Christians to non-Christians in twenty-eight different categories. These categories included many of the “little things.” Things such as what types of TV programs you watch, what kind of language you use, how you spend free-time, etc. After compiling the data, what did this research group discover? They discovered that in *all* twenty-eight categories there was virtually no difference between Christians and non-Christians.⁸

Yes, it’s in the little things that we, as Christians, have collectively failed. Yet, Jesus said, “You *are* the salt of the earth. The little things you do should make an impact on the world, not mirror it.”

Of course, it is not just about the little things. There are also big things. Jesus tells His listeners, “You *are* the light of the world.”

Now, again, He doesn’t say, “If you’re having a good day, and things are going right, maybe you should think about being a light to the world.” No, He says, “You *are* the light of the world. You’re to be like a city on a mountain, glowing in

the night for all to see.”

In Bible times, there were no streetlights. If you were traveling in the country at night, it would be pitch black. Therefore, a city with its lights shining in the darkness would be a guide to all around. No one with their eyes open would miss it. That is the power of light. It is seen. It is noticed. When Jesus said, “You *are* the light of the world.” He was saying, “You need to be seen. You need to be guides to the world. You need to draw the world to Me, like a city glowing on a mountain does to all the weary travelers walking in the darkness.”

There are many Christians who say, “I witness with my life. I just quietly go about being like Jesus. The way I live is witness enough.”

According to Jesus, however, that is not enough. That is being salt, but that is only one part of Jesus’ command. He calls us to be light as well. He calls us to do things that would guide and draw people to Himself. Because of this, Jesus also commanded in this passage, “Put your light on a stand. Let it shine for all.” His order is to flick on the switch! Turn on the light! Start shining, so people will see what you are doing and praise God.”

In the big things, in the little things, we should bother because Jesus has called us to be salt and light. Not only has

He called us, He has commanded us. Why? Because everyone needs Him. That, by the way, is the second answer to the question “Why should we bother?”

Because Everyone Needs Jesus

Notice that in Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus doesn’t say, “You are the salt in your family.” He doesn’t say, “You are the salt in your community.” He doesn’t even say, “You are the salt in your nation.” No, He says, “You are the salt of the earth.” That means everyone!

How does Jesus continue in this passage? Does He say, “You are the light on your block”? No. Does He say, “You are the light in your town”? No. Well, how about, “You are the light on your continent”? Still, no. Jesus says, “You are the light of the world.”

Still not finished, Jesus presses on. He says, “Let your light shine for *all* to see...so that *everyone* will praise your heavenly Father.”

There is no one on this planet that Jesus does not want to reach. No matter how much we may not like someone; no matter how much evil we might think someone has done; no matter how undeserving we think someone might be, they still need Jesus. Jesus still loves them and still wants to reach them.

In 2 Peter 3:9, the apostle Peter tells his readers that

God is being patient with the world. He does not want *anyone* to be lost, but He wants all people to change their hearts and lives. Meanwhile, the apostle Paul would write to his young apprentice Timothy, in 1 Timothy 2:4, that God wants *all* people to be saved and to learn the truth.

Robert Coleman, Christian professor and author of such best-selling books as *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, talks about the first town in which he pastored. It was a small rural town, and Coleman soon discovered that when someone died in this small town, a church would ring its bells. People would then come from all over town to that church in order to find out who had died.

Well, early one morning, Coleman began to ring his church's bells, and soon people started showing up to find out who had died. They came into the church to find an open casket. The new pastor motioned for them to look inside. Yet, there was no person inside the casket only a mirror. When the people saw their reflection in that mirror, he would tell them, "You are dead in your sins! You need Christ to save you."

Coleman rang the bell most of the morning and dozens of people showed up. Then the police came. "You can't ring the bells unless someone has died," they informed. But Coleman kept right on ringing the bell. He was willing to do whatever it took to reach people for Christ, because he

understood that everyone needs Jesus.

All need Jesus to shelter them when the storms of life blow. All need Jesus to hold them when the trials and tribulations come raging. All need Jesus to be their rock when tragedies strike. All need Jesus when it seems hope is gone. All need Jesus, and God wants all to receive Jesus. Therefore, we must obey Jesus' command to be salt, to be light, and to get on a stand and shine out for all.

In Luke 19:10, Jesus told all those gathered at Zacchaeus' house, "*The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*"

To Nicodemus, Jesus said in John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.*"

Imagine that a couple is out camping with their five children. No, I don't know why they're camping either. My feeling is if God had intended for people to sleep in tents, He wouldn't have invented houses. And let's not even talk about how you go to the bathroom at a campsite...

But I digress.

Back to our couple camping with their five children. The father wakes up in the middle of the night because he thinks he hears a noise. Looking around, he notices that all the

kids' sleeping bags are empty. He opens the tent and sees the smoldering campfire, but there is no sign of his children. Getting worried, he wakes up his wife, but she doesn't know where they could be.

On the verge of panic, the two of them hurriedly grab some flashlights and begin searching the woods, shouting out in the darkness for their lost children. After what seems like forever, the sun begins to pull itself above the horizon and dawn begins to break, but still there is no sign of the kids.

The mother, in desperation, runs back to the tent to call 911 on her cell phone. Though while she's dialing, Dad comes running back with one of the children and motions for her to hang up. "Don't worry honey, I found one! Don't bother the police. One kid is good enough. Let's just pack up and leave."

The wife protests, "Pack up and leave!? We should at least find one more. I'm not leaving until we've found two of our five children!"

A few minutes later, another child is found happily playing with coyotes and poison ivy. Rejoicing, these jubilant parents grab their gear, put their two children in the car, and head home stopping for ice-cream on the way.

Could such a story ever be true? Would this couple ever settle for just two out of five children? Would they actually leave three children lost in the woods? If we don't

think a human couple would do that with their children, what makes us think that God would want to do that with His? Most likely, these parents would not rest, would not sleep, and would not stop searching until *all* their children were found.

God is the same way. He is not satisfied with small percentages and handfuls of salvations. He would not have us stop until the whole world is changed. Why? Well, that takes us to the third and final answer. God would not have us stop until all of His children are found because Jesus says Hell is real.

Because Jesus Says That Hell is Real

The day will come when there will be no more time for seeking and no more time for saving. One day it will be too late. What we do until that day will literally make an eternal difference. Do you know that in the time it takes you to read this sentence, eight people will die? When you started that sentence, eight people were alive who no longer are.

108 people die every minute. That means nearly 6500 people die every hour. Multiply that by twenty-four and we find that, by the end of the day, nearly 156,000 people will have died. Times that number by 365 and you will quickly discover that, by the end of this year, roughly fifty-seven million will have died. In just six years, the equivalent of the

population of the United States of America will be dead.
Where will they be?

Jesus tells us where in Matthew 25:

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit upon His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in His presence, and He will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at His right hand and the goats at His left. Then the King will say to those on the right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’...Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons!’...And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.”

Jesus says that everyone that ever lived will stand before Him. At that time, all of humanity will be separated into two groups. On the right will be those who followed Jesus, and on the left will be those who did not.

On that day, Jesus is going to turn to the group on His right and welcome them into Heaven to spend eternity with the Father. Jesus is then going to turn to those on His left, and He will send them away to eternal punishment. What will it be like to stand with those on the right and hear Jesus invite you to spend eternity with Him? I think it will be unspeakably amazing!

But what will it be like when those with you on the right look over and see their friends, relatives, classmates, neighbors, and work associates standing with the other group? What will it be like to see your father, your daughter, your neighbor, that person you worked with year after year over on the left? What will it be like to see their faces when Jesus tells them where they are going? What will it be like to hear their cries and pleas, to hear them begging for one final chance?

What will it be like if they see you over on the right, and cry out, “Why didn’t you tell me!? Why didn’t you let me know!?” What will *that* be like? I think it will be unspeakably gut-wrenching.

I guarantee when that day comes, you won’t be thinking, “I should have played more golf.” “I wish I had bought more video games.” “I didn’t get to watch enough TV.” “I should have put another five hours a week in at the office.”

You won’t be thinking any of that. What you will be

thinking is, “Why didn’t I do more, say more, be more? Why didn’t I seek to be a world changer while there was still time?”

Understand. As sure as you are reading this sentence, that day will come. We have work to do before it arrives. The question is: Are you ready and willing to do that work? Don’t be fooled. The eternity of many hangs on your answer to that question.

Are You Ready for the Next Step?

In Romans 10:13-14, Paul writes, *Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them?*

Paul says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on Him, if they don’t believe? And how can they believe, if they haven’t heard? And how can they hear, if no one tells them?”

There is a part we must play. Being salt and light today can and will change the world and impact eternity. Jesus is standing with His arms wide open, waiting to bring comfort and care and life to all who would come to Him. It is our job to point the way.

Let’s finish this chapter by giving you a few of

those pointers.

- Don't believe that little things will not add up. They will. Be conscientious each day in how you speak to, and act around, your friends, neighbors, classmates, and coworkers
- Into each new setting you enter every day (work, school, restaurant, hotel, grocery store, etc.) pray this prayer, "Father, if there is someone here who is struggling, who needs to know about your love, use me to reach them today"
- Invest in a missions' trip either overseas or in your own country. Nothing stirs up a passion for serving the Lord more than a short-term missions' trip. Seek to serve the Lord in another context at least one week out of the year
- Support a child through *Gospel for Asia* or *World Vision*. Begin investing in the life of another and see the fulfillment it brings
- Grab a newspaper and go to the obituaries. See who was alive last week but is no longer so this week. Let that somber realization move you to action

THINK IT THROUGH QUESTIONS

Jesus commanded us to be salt and to be light. What does it mean to be salt? To be light?

The Bible is clear that God wants everyone to be saved, but yet people die without knowing Christ. Why is that so?

One of Satan's great tricks is to get Christians to forget that Hell is a real and eternal place. How would a healthy understanding of Hell increase the impact Christians have on the world?

What are some little things you can do this week to show God's love?

What are some big things you can invest in to show God's love?

COUNTING THE COST

For six years, I had an albino ferret named Stinky. For those of you who know about ferrets, you understand why her name was Stinky. For those of you who don't know about ferrets, I can tell you that they are known for two things: an abundant "aroma" and an abundant curiosity. Let's just focus on the second one, shall we? A ferret's overly curious nature has them getting into anything and everything which tends to get themselves, and their owners, into a lot of trouble.

One day while at my parents' home, we were all sitting in the family room watching television, when CRASH! As fast as I could, I made my way into the living room only to discover that Stinky had knocked over a vase on the coffee table causing it to break into about a dozen pieces. My first thought was, "Oh good, it was just that ugly green vase. I bet that will

only be about fifteen dollars to replace.”

My mother, on the other hand, nearly had a heart-attack. With shock echoing in her voice, she exclaimed “That vase cost me \$180!”

Now it was my turn to have the heart-attack! “You spent \$180 on that vase! Who spends \$180 on a vase!?”

My mother, in all seriousness, replied, “To me, it was worth it.”

The Value We Give

Isn't it funny how the cost of something is usually secondary to the value we give it? In other words, it's not the cost of something that matters first. Rather, it's the value it holds in your eyes. To me, \$180 for an ugly green vase was ridiculous. To my mother, it was well worth the price. Why? The cost of the vase hadn't changed. The difference was the value it held in our eyes.

How about the guy who spent two million dollars to buy Mark McGuire's home run ball, the one that beat Micky Mantle's record? We think, “Is he crazy? Who spends two million for a baseball?” But to him, it was worth it. The value of that ball, in his eyes, far outweighed the cost.

Then you hear about people actually paying twenty dollars or more to watch the Flyers play, and you think, “Who

would spend that to watch them?” (I am a Philadelphia sports’ fan. Our secret handshake involves wiping tears from each other’s eyes.)

We’ve been spending a great deal of time with Matthew 5:13-16. Let’s read it again here.

Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world – like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. Don’t hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

It’s easy to say, “Yes, I believe God wants me to be salt and light.” It’s easy to say, “Yes, I believe God can use me to be a world changer.” It’s easy to say, “Yes, I believe God wants me to be a bridge from Him to the world.” And it’s easy to say, “Yes, I know everyone needs Jesus.”

It’s easy, very easy, to say those things. Doing something about it, however; that’s a different story. To actually do

something about it comes down to counting the cost. It comes down to how much value Jesus, His Word, and His kingdom hold in our eyes.

Does the value outweigh the cost?

We Must Count the Cost

We must ask ourselves some questions. Questions like, “Do I value Jesus enough to actually obey His commands? Do I believe the value outweighs the cost?” If the answers are “Yes,” we do it. If the answers are “No,” we don’t. Jesus knows this is what it all comes down to. This is why He spoke as He did in Luke 14.

“If you want to be My follower you must love Me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, more than your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be My disciple. And you cannot be My disciple if you do not carry your own cross and follow Me. But don't begin until you count the cost...no one can become My disciple without giving up everything for Me. Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavor, how do you make it salty again? Flavorless salt is good neither for the soil nor for fertilizer. It is thrown

away. Anyone who is willing to hear should listen and understand!"

Look at how Jesus starts out. He says, "If you want to be My follower, you must love Me more than you love your own father, or mother, or wife, or children. Yes, you must even love Me more than you love yourself."

In other words, our Savior plainly states, "I must be the most valued person in your life. I must be number one in your life. The value you give Me should far outweigh everyone else in your life."

Don't be confused here. Jesus is not saying, "Don't love your family or yourself." There are multiple verses in the Bible that call on us to take care of our family. Further, God also commands, in both the Old and New Testaments, that we love others as we love ourselves. The Lord, indeed, wants us to love and care for our family and for ourselves. But what He wants more than that is for us to put Him first. He says, "Love your family, but not more than you love Me. My will, My kingdom, My way, these must be first."

Jesus continues. He unapologetically points out, "You cannot be My disciple unless you pick up your cross and follow Me. You cannot be My disciple unless My value outweighs the cost of carrying the cross."

This was an incredibly visceral picture for Jesus' listeners. Everyone within earshot of Jesus' voice knew what happened when someone picked up a cross. They had seen the Romans make condemned men and women carry their crosses to a crucifixion site--to pick up a cross meant you were losing your life. This is no easy thing, so Jesus continues in Luke 14 by saying, "Don't begin until you count the cost."

Jesus knows that if we can't put Him first and keep everything else second, it just isn't going to work. Finally, Jesus brings up salt again. "If you're going to blend in with the world (read: "If the cost of standing up for Me is too high"), you're like salt that has lost its flavor."

If salt doesn't have flavor, what's the point? Flavorless salt is equal to no salt at all. Who would use flavorless salt? No one.

Here in this passage, Jesus is drawing a line in the sand. A line between being a world changer or just blending in with the world. Jesus is asking, "Who here values Me enough to step over the line? Who here thinks what I have on this side of the line is worth more than what you have on that side of the line?"

It comes down to counting the cost. What is worth more in our eyes? If Jesus is worth the most, we will cross the line. We will follow Him. We will be salt and light. If we don't see

Jesus as worth the most, we won't cross the line.

The Practical Side

Please realize that counting the cost is never a once and done thing. It must be a daily choice. So how does that play out in the day to day? Here are a few examples:

Suppose someone gets up in church to sing a song during the offering. This person begins by saying, "Well, I didn't really have time to practice this, but I hope you like it." (Yes, I have actually heard that in church.)

That is a counting the cost statement. That is saying, "I know God deserves my best, and this gift of worship I'm about to give should be the best it can be, but I didn't value this gift to God enough to practice. Instead of waking up early or going to bed late one day so I could practice, I counted the cost and sleep was more important. Instead of missing a television show one evening so I could practice, I counted the cost and the show was more important. All those things came first, making this gift of worship to God second, but I hope you like it."

What about reading the Bible? The same principle applies. If God's Word has great value, we put something aside, and we read it every day. If it doesn't have great value in our eyes, we don't "find the time."

What about going to church? If worshipping God has great value, we set the alarm earlier. We get out of bed. We tell the kids, “No soccer game for you this morning. God comes first.” If it doesn’t have great value in our eyes, we hit the snooze button or skip church because soccer is more important.

What about giving money to a missionary that God has called to a faraway land or to some church project the Lord would have us do? If God’s will has value in our eyes, we will give. If it doesn’t have value, we won’t.

What about praying for lost friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors? If we value God using us to be salt, to be light, to be a bridge to the world, we will pray for those people *all the time*. If it holds little value in our eyes, we won’t.

Those Are Tough Words!

When I first sat down to study Luke 14, I thought, “Yikes! Jesus, there are no warm-fuzzies for me to use here. There are no funny little stories to throw in. What You’re saying is going to be hard to swallow!”

What do you think Jesus said back? He said, “You’re right. Those are tough words. I am calling for a decision, but I’m not asking for anything I haven’t already done Myself.”

Yes, understand that Jesus counted the cost long before

He asked us to. He counted the cost and valued us more. And because He valued us so greatly, He paid the price.

Consider the following Bible verses.

Philippians 2:6-8 poignantly states, *Though Jesus was God, He did not demand and cling to His rights as God. He made Himself nothing; He took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form He obediently humbled Himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross.*

Galatians 1:4 tells us, *Jesus gave Himself for our sins to free us from this evil world we live in.*

1 Timothy 2:6 reads, *He sacrificed Himself for all people to free them from their sins.*

There's a story of a nine year old girl who was very sick and near death. She desperately needed a blood transfusion. However, she had a rare blood type, and no donor other than her seven year-old brother could be found. After several weeks, and several unsuccessful attempts at finding another suitable donor, the medical staff finally decided the young boy was the last and best option. A doctor came and tried his best to explain the situation to the lad, telling him that his sister needed his blood to live.

The doctor then asked, "Would you give your blood for her?"

The boy tensed up for a moment. His lip quivered. A long moment passed, until he seemed to relax and say, “Sure, for my sister, I would.”

A few hours later, this healthy little boy was put on a stretcher and wheeled into a room next to his sister, who was pale and weak and thin. A needle was inserted into the boy’s arm, and he saw his blood beginning to run through a thin tube. Turning to the doctor, he asked meekly, “Doctor, when do I die?”

It was then that the doctor realized why the boy had tensed up when he asked for his blood. The little boy thought he would have to give all of his blood. He thought he’d have to give his life for his sister. And he was willing!

This story beautifully illustrates what Jesus did, and how much He values us. Jesus saw all of history unfold before His eyes. He saw what sin did to us, how it brought death, and how it separated us from His Father and made us wander into meaninglessness. He saw what life would be like without a connection to Him, without a way to come into His Father’s love and presence.

Knowing there was only one cure for this fatal disease called sin, Father turned to Son and asked, “Would you give your blood for them? Would you suffer and die for them? Would you make a way for them to come back to Me?”

Jesus counted the cost, looked back at His Father, and said, “Sure, for them, I would.”

That’s how much we matter to Jesus. That’s how much we are valued in His eyes. Jesus counted the cost of leaving the glory of heaven and dying on the cross like a criminal. He paid the price because we were worth that much to Him.

As I mentioned earlier, you know how much something is worth by the price people are willing to pay for it. With that in mind, how do we know how much Jesus values us? How do we know how much God loves us? The cross. That is our proof. There is no looking at the cross and missing the value Jesus has placed on us. Jesus, as the Son of God, could have climbed down off of that cross whenever He wanted to, but He didn’t. He stayed there because of us.

The love and the value Jesus placed on us held Him on the cross. Jesus put us first. And because He did, we can enjoy real life on earth and eternal life in heaven. Likewise, when we count the cost and put Jesus first, the world can encounter Christ through us. We can be the proof a desperate world is searching for. When we put Christ first, when we pay the price, the world can see Christ shine through us. They can follow the path we have lit for them.

The Cost

Someone once said, “God’s love cost Him His Son and through it we saw grace. Christ’s love cost Him His life and through it we saw sacrifice. What will people see in us if we let our love cost something?”

There is a cost. There absolutely is. But it all comes down to this: Do you value God enough to pay it? If you don’t know if you can, look to the cross, look and see how much Jesus values you.

C.T. Studd was the son of very wealthy parents. He was an excellent cricket player and, at the age of nineteen, was captain of the team at Eton. While attending Cambridge University in the 1880s, he became a national hero. Cambridge University challenged the mighty Australian Cricket team to a match and C.T., together with his brother, put together the winning innings.

He became a household name. He had everything: wealth and fame. Then in 1883, D.L. Moody came to Cambridge to preach, and C.T. was converted. Although he had fame and fortune at his feet, C.T. left it all to become a missionary in China. When he returned to England several years later to deal with his dead father’s estate, he gave all of his inheritance to the China Inland Mission, then he left his family again and went to Africa.

When asked how he could give up wealth and fame and family, Studd replied with these words, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”

Do you feel the same way?

Are You Ready for the Next Step?

Jesus has called us to be salt and to be light. Jesus has called us to get on a stand and shine. He has called us to build bridges to the world. Jesus has called us to love Him more than we love our own families and our own lives. That seems hard. But remember, He loved us enough to give up His life.

Jesus asks us to pick up our cross and follow Him. That seems hard. But remember, He loved us enough to pick up a cross, take it up a hill called Calvary, and be nailed to it for our sins. Jesus asks us to count the cost and, yes, that cost seems high. But remember, Jesus counted the cost and willingly paid the price to set us free. Now it's our turn. How much do we value Him? Enough to do any of the following?

- Find a quiet spot to read through Luke 14:25-35. After reading, spend some time in reflection, asking yourself if Jesus is more valuable to you than anything else
- Spend some time in prayer. Surrender everything over

to the Lord. Give Him free reign in you and over your life and possessions. Ask Him where, and with what, He wants you to sacrifice time, treasure, and talents for His glory and the benefit of a lost world

- Are you saving up for something? A car, vacation, new home, giant screen TV, etc.? Consider taking that savings and investing it in a ministry, a missions' trip, or missionaries already stationed in the field
- How much time a week do you watch TV? Commit to cutting that in half for one month. Use the extra time to get involved in your neighbors' lives, volunteer at a local ministry, or at your church, etc. You might find that after the month is up that your life is much more fulfilling with *less* television and *more* world changing
- Join a small group at your church. (If your church does not have small groups, join a small group at a friend's church or start one of your own.) Spend time with other believers praying and asking God how you can be used to make a difference in people's lives

THINK IT THROUGH QUESTIONS

Jesus told His listeners to “count the cost” before beginning. As you count the cost, what do you see as the hardest thing to give up for Jesus? Why?

If you do not already, what keeps you from reading the Bible and praying daily?

What seems to keep you from making this a priority?

What steps can you take to make sure Jesus is number one in your life?

How would doing these things help you better obey the Lord’s commands?

FILLED WITH LOVE

A few weeks before penning this chapter, I was asked to speak at a chapel service for a local Christian school. With children as young as kindergarteners in attendance, I wanted to come up with something to keep the little ones engaged while I talked about what it meant to be “filled with love.”

I settled upon playing a decidedly simple game with the kids. I would pull a packaged item out of a bag, read the labeling, and then have the students guess what was inside the wrapping. First, I pulled out a clear bag of marshmallows, read the printing—*Jet-Puffed mini-marshmallows*—and asked everyone what was inside. Not surprisingly, most shouted out “marshmallows!”

I opened the package and ate a couple, telling the kids I had to be sure. They were right! I dug into the bag of items

again and grabbed something new. I informed the auditorium that the red covering had gold letters that spelled *Kit-Kat Crisp Wafers*. “What could it be?” I wondered aloud. It didn’t take long for several children to shout out, “I love Kit-Kats!”

“Me too!” I shouted back. “But are you sure it’s a Kit-Kat? Let me open it up and see.” Tearing into the package, I broke off a wafer and bit in. “Mmmm! Yes, it is a Kit-Kat! This game is fun! Let’s see what else is in the bag.”

Rummaging through, I hit upon a third item and told the kids that the yellow wrapper read *Milk-Chocolate Reese’s Peanut-Butter Egg*. Teachers had to contain their students from rushing to get the egg! “You seem pretty sure,” I stated. “But there’s only one way to find out.” I tore off the wrapper and shoved the whole thing in my mouth.

“Wow! You guys were right again!” I garbled with a mouth full of chocolatey peanut butter goodness. “This game is awesome! Let’s see what else is in the bag.” Peering inside, I let the kids know that there was just one thing left, and, boy, it looked promising.

Reading the blue and white packaging, I told everyone, “It says *Oreo Mega-Stuf*. Not Double-Stuf, Mega-Stuf!” There was pandemonium in the auditorium, and I’m pretty sure I won’t be invited back.

Pulling back on the “peel here” label, I revealed the

creamed-filled delights. But, of course, I had to make sure. I couldn't take any chances, so I picked one out and took a healthy bite. With crumbs dropping everywhere, I let the students know that it was, in fact, a Mega-Stuf cookie.

With everyone in the room now super-jealous of me, I explained why I opened with such a silly game. I wanted everyone to see the obvious—we understand that what something is labeled is what that something is. We expect something labeled marshmallows to be filled with marshmallows. We expect something labeled as a peanut butter egg to be filled with a peanut butter egg.

Similarly, when someone is labeled “Christian,” everyone should understand what fills that person. Just as it is easy to tell that a bag labeled marshmallows is filled with marshmallows, so it should be easy to tell what someone labeled “Christian” is filled with.

As a Christian, we should be filled with love...and it should be obvious! People who don't know much about Christians should be able to say, “I don't know much about Christians, but this I do know. Christians are filled with love.”

Unfortunately, that is *not* the case. Most non-Christians do not describe the average Christian as filled with love. Not even close.

Misunderstanding What Love Is

The problem is that we have lost a true understanding of what love really means. We equate love with warm-fuzzy feelings, puppies, rainbows, butterflies, and unicorns. Tingly feelings and infatuation have hijacked a real definition of love.

Or we think that love means doing nice things for people who are nice to us. I made the mistake of doing that with my wife once. (I won't make that mistake again!)

My wife is an awesome person who regularly does nice things for me, so I figured I needed to return the gesture. Since she likes to go shopping, especially for clothes, I figured I would tag along with her the next time she went to Kohls (even though I *despise* clothes' shopping.) After forty-five minutes, I was crawling down an aisle begging Jesus to come back! That's not love!

The Bible explains what love is and what it looks like in Ephesians 5:2. There, the Apostle Paul writes, *Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.*

Paul charges all those who call themselves Christians to live a life filled with love, and then he goes on to explain what that looks like. He doesn't say, "Live a life filled with love and float around on warm-fuzzy feelings and infatuated

tingles.” Moreover, he doesn’t say, “Live a life filled with love and do nice things for people who are nice to you.” No!

He says, “Live a life filled with love...and here’s what that looks like. It looks like Jesus sacrificing Himself on the cross for our sins.”

When speaking about love in this verse, Paul uses the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* is the highest form of love in the Greek language and is essentially a sacrificial, unconditional, not-about-me kind of love. *Agape* does not take into account what we want, what we like, nor what our plans and agendas are. No, *agape* only takes into account the example of Christ who unconditionally loved a sinful world enough to say, “Not My will, but Yours be done” and sacrificed Himself on our behalf.

Being filled with that kind of love takes on many forms; however, I wanted to focus on one form that doesn’t get a lot of play—loving people enough to do everything in our power to see their eternities changed. Loving people enough to tell them about Jesus before it is too late.

We Have a Job to Do

In Chapter Four, we noted that 108 people die every minute. That means nearly 6500 people die every hour. Multiply that by twenty-four, and we find that, by the end of the day,

approximately 156,000 people will have died.

Times that number by 365 and you will quickly discover that by the end of a year roughly fifty-seven million will have died. In just six years, the equivalent of the population of the United States of America will be dead.

Where will they be?

Statistics tell us that roughly two out of three people die without Christ as their Savior. That means two out of every three people head into a Christ-less eternity. We all know friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors who don't know Christ. Do we love them enough to tell them about Jesus before it's too late?

"But, Mark, it's embarrassing to talk about my faith."

"But, Mark, what if someone stops liking me if I start getting all 'Jesusy' with them?"

"But, Mark, I could get rejected by someone I love."

"But, Mark, I could lose a friend over Jesus."

Yeah, but do you love them? Do you love them enough to risk being embarrassed, uncomfortable, or rejected? Love, real love, is not about us—what we want, what we like, what makes us comfortable. Real love is following the example of Christ who put us above Himself, threw comfort in the trash, and went to the cross for our sins.

1 John 4:9-12 reads,

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

Note that in the above verses we experience God's love for us because He *showed* it by sending His Son. Though we did nothing to deserve or earn His love, He displayed it by offering up His Son on our behalf. Having experienced such love, it is now our turn to take that into a hurting and needy world.

Look again at verse 12, it states, *No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.*

A world that desperately needs God *cannot* see Him. However, when we take His love out into the world, they can see His love in us. The verse goes on to say that when we do this, then God's love is brought to *full expression* through us. The Greek word for that phrase literally means “carried

through to completion.”

Understand the progression. God displays His love through the cross. We grab hold of that love and allow it to fill us. Then we take that love into the world around us, so that others can see God through us. That is, we carry that love to completion and bring people back around to the beginning where they encounter God’s love through the cross.

Unfortunately, most of us *don’t* carry God’s love to completion. We gladly take in God’s love, but then keep it to ourselves and never share it with the world around us. Instead of being brought to full expression, it stagnates in us and goes nowhere. The circle remains incomplete, and millions miss out on experiencing God’s love and forgiveness.

But this is our job. We must finish the circle and carry it through to completion. This is why three of the four Gospels end with a charge to take the message of God’s love to the world.

*Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”*⁹

*And then [Jesus] told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.”*¹⁰

It was also written that this message would be

*proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: “There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.”*¹¹

Getting on Mission

As I write this chapter, I am actively recruiting teens and young adults to head to Guadalajara, Mexico on a missions’ trip. The Guadalajara metro area contains over five million people, ninety-eight percent of whom are unsaved. Imagine, if Jesus came back tomorrow, only two out of every one hundred people in that area would go to Heaven.

I’ve been excited about this trip for some time and have worked to tell others the difference we could make in that area. Opportunities abound to encourage local missionaries, help them create new relationships with residents (as we run a football fundamentals camp), plant seeds, water some others, and see a harvest of souls saved.

Frankly, though, I have been shocked by the excuses that I have heard *not* to go. It will probably be too much money for me. Mexico is far away. Isn’t it a little bit dangerous there? And my favorite—mission trips aren’t my thing.

Yeah, but do you love? Are you ready to live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ, who didn’t make anything about His will, His comfort, or His anything?

Loving others, being a world-changer, requires leaving our comfort zone and understanding that what is or isn't "our thing" is not as important as people meeting Jesus when we bring His love to full expression.

It cost Jesus His life to set us free, so we need to be willing to pay the price so others can see that love lived out through us. Now, of course, I understand that there are legitimate reasons for not being able to go on particular mission trips. However, if your reasons for saying no revolve around fears, doubts, and concerns, *that is not good enough!*

Look at what 2 Corinthians 5:11-14 says about this.

Because we understand our fearful responsibility to the Lord, we work hard to persuade others. God knows we are sincere, and I hope you know this, too. Are we commending ourselves to you again? No, we are giving you a reason to be proud of us, so you can answer those who brag about having a spectacular ministry rather than having a sincere heart. If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. Either way, Christ's love controls us.

Right at the beginning of this passage of Scripture,

Paul makes it clear that he and his companions understand their “fearful responsibility” to bring God’s love to a hurting world. In other words, Paul is saying, “If you want to talk about fear, then talk about having a fear of failing at your responsibility. Talk about having a fear of missing out on opportunities to show Christ to others. Don’t let the devil fill you with fears and doubts and concerns about going. Instead, fear what might happen because you decided to stay put.”

Doubling down, at the end of the passage, Paul tells the Corinthians that Christ’s love is controlling his every move. The Greek word for “control” in verse 14 is really a fascinating word. It carries with it the idea of hands being clasped around something.

Here’s the picture. When my son, Kyle, was very young, it was not uncommon for him to be sent to his room. To “help” him along, I would place a hand on each shoulder and guide him right on into the bedroom. The weight of my hands clasping around each shoulder controlled his movement right to where I needed him to go.

This is the picture that Paul is giving. He feels the weight of the fearful responsibility we all have to take the Gospel to the world. More than that, he feels the weight of God’s hands guiding him forward from one person to the next, one town to the next, and one country to the next.

This needs to be us as well. We need to feel the weight of God's hands on our shoulders, guiding us to other countries on mission trips, leading us across the street to our neighbor, compelling us to pick up the phone and call that unsaved family member, spurring us on to love and good deeds, and urging us to be world-changers.

Are You Ready for the Next Step?

In Chapter Four, we also looked at Matthew 25:31-46. In those verses, Jesus made it clear that everyone that ever lived will stand before Him. At that time, all of humanity will be separated into two groups. On the right will be those who followed Jesus, and on the left will be those who did not.

On that day, Jesus is going to turn to the group on His right and welcome them into Heaven to spend eternity with the Father. Jesus is then going to turn to those on His left, and He will send them away to eternal punishment. I asked you to think about what it will be like when those of us on the right look over and see our friends, relatives, classmates, neighbors, and work associates standing with the other group? What will it be like to see your father, your daughter, your neighbor, that person you worked with year after year over on the left?

What will it be like to see their faces when Jesus tells them where they are going? What will it be like to hear their

cries and pleas, to hear them begging for one final chance? I guarantee when that day comes, you won't be thinking, "Well, at least I wasn't embarrassed." "I'm glad I stayed silent, so I never had to face a lost friendship or rejection." "It's a good thing mission trips weren't my thing."

You won't be thinking any of that. What you will be thinking is, "Why didn't I do more, say more, be more? Why didn't I seek to be a world changer while there was still time?"

Now, you might be thinking, "Well, maybe it's easy for you, Mark. But it's not so easy for me."

I assure you this is *not* easy for me. I am *way* more introverted than extroverted. When I am on an airplane, my conversation with the person next to me is usually nothing more than, "Hi, how are you?" "How about this weather?" And "Excuse me, I need to get through to use the bathroom."

Because that is the case with me, I decided that I would keep a prayer card. On that card, I wrote the names of five people I knew were not saved, and I began to pray for them. I started praying that God would work in their hearts and that He would open up opportunities for me to share Him with them because I am terrible at creating those opportunities for myself.

As I close this chapter, I will share one story from my years with this card. 1997, as I mentioned in a previous

section, was the year I graduated from college after seven long years. As I planned to head to Romania in the fall of that year, I had one last summer to work as a counselor at a Bible camp.

During that summer, I had the worst camper you could ever imagine. His name was Jon, and he was belligerent, foul-mouthed, rude, and more, much, much, more. A week of camp went from Sunday afternoon to Saturday morning, and I think I spent most of that asking God for the strength to love Jon and not tie him up and ship him home.

After the camp week was over, no one was happier than me. I felt like a giant weight had been released from my back when I saw Jon's parents drive off with the teen securely in the backseat. But then Sunday afternoon came around again, and guess who showed up for a second week of camp? Jon. And guess who requested me to be his counselor again? Yes, that's right, Jon.

I shouted to God, "See! This is why you shouldn't love people! This is the kind of stuff that happens!"

Anyway, Jon did not end up accepting the Lord at either week of camp, so I added him to my prayer card and prayed for him often. God went to work. Though the teen lived about an hour from me, I was able to connect with him a few times in person and then, more frequently, over the phone.

In 2007, ten years after our two weeks at camp

together, Jon called me one evening and said, “Something happened to me this week, and I wanted you to be the first to know.” I thought he was going to tell me that he was sent to prison!

Instead, he said, “I accepted the Lord this week, and I wanted you to be the first to know.”

I have many stories like that because when God’s people pray, He goes to work! So I encourage you to start your own prayer card.

- Make a card. List the names of five unsaved friends, relatives, associates, classmates, or neighbors and begin praying over that card every day
- Grab your local paper and read through the obituaries. See who was alive last week but now no longer is. Let the realization strike you that each name you read can *never* again hear about Jesus. Understand that each person you know will someday have their names in that section of the paper. You only have so much time to share
- Check out both national and international mission trips. Don’t miss a chance to make a difference in Jesus’ name
- Whenever you go into a place with a lot of people—a

grocery store, restaurant, retail store, school, etc.—ask the Lord to guide you to anyone in that place that may be hurting or struggling

- Pray and ask the Lord to fill you with His love, so that the non-Christians around you will be able to say, “I don’t know much about Christians, but (insert your name) is a Christian and I’ve seen how (insert your name) lives, so that must mean Christians are filled with love”

THINK IT THROUGH QUESTIONS

According to the Bible, what does it mean to be filled with love?

Would your friends, relatives, associates, classmates, and neighbors say that you were filled with love? Why or why not?

What does it mean to bring God's love to full expression? Would you say you were doing that consistently? Why or why not?

Where is God's love compelling you to go and share the Good News?

When will you make your prayer card and begin daily prayer over it?

THE FINAL INGREDIENT

Authority. There is nothing like authority to “encourage” someone to accomplish a task. Growing up, when my parents gave my sister and I chores, we did them. Why? Because they had the authority (which meant they had the power to send us to our rooms and take away video game privileges)!

I remember one time being assigned a chore to do that I did not want to do. My sister told me time and time again that I needed to do it, but I basically told her to take a hike. “Not happening!” I defiantly announced.

Finally, realizing she wasn’t getting anywhere, my sister pulled out the only card she had left. “I’m telling Dad!”

“I was going to do it.” I shot back, thoughts of spending the weekend in my room dancing in my head. “I just needed to rest a bit first.”

Authority changes everything.

Let's look one last time at Jesus' words found in Matthew 5:13-16:

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world – like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth.” That is an authoritative statement. He doesn't say, “Hey, what do you think? Should you try being the salt of the earth?” No, He puts it simply. “*You are the salt of the earth.*”

You see, when Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world,” He has the authority to back it up. Jesus, of course, understanding the power of His authority, told the disciples in Matthew 28, “*I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make*

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

I worked at an office supply store during my college years. I was actually employed at that store for three full years. Perhaps three years doesn't sound like all that much. But let me tell you, retail years are like dog years. In my estimation, one year in retail is like seven years at a “normal” job. The turnover rate is incredible. Some of my fellow employees lasted only a week, some a summer, others six months. I can honestly say that no one who worked there when I started was there when I finished. Not even close.

I don't know how many people came and went in those three years. During that time, I had four different general managers, at least a dozen different assistant managers, and saw as many as one hundred fellow employees come and go. Because of this high turnover rate, coupled with my “longevity,” I was often given some authority to get certain tasks completed. And in case you were not aware, in the retail environment, with that authority comes a clipboard.

At the time, we sold them at the store for ninety-nine cents. They were basically cheap particle board with a metal clip bolted onto it. But when I put one of those in my hand and

started walking around with it, I soon felt a rush of power. I looked down at it frequently for no real reason and scribbled meaningless notes. I figured it would make me look more “official,” thus adding weight to my authority. I’d then go to some lowly, clipboard-less coworker, look down at my clipboard and say, “You need to do this, this, and that.”

“Why?” They’d respond, apparently not understanding the authority that I derived from the clipboard. Therefore, I’d have to tell them, “Because I have the clipboard, and I said so!”

In all seriousness, it wasn’t the clipboard that gave me the authority. What gave me the authority was the fact that a manager gave me a job to do. The one in charge of the store had charged me with a task, and he or she had given me the authority and the resources necessary to accomplish the job. Notice in the passage from Matthew 28, which is often called “The Great Commission,” that the first thing Jesus mentions is the authority given to Him. This is not some kind of “clipboard” authority. No, Jesus says His authority is complete and total.

Before He even says, “Go,” He is sure to inform the disciples that *complete* authority in heaven and on earth is His. Take a look at the kind of authority that Christ has. Ephesians 1:21 states, *Now Jesus is far above any ruler or authority or*

power or leader or anything else in this world or in the world to come.

Colossians 2:10 informs us that *Jesus is the Lord over every ruler and authority in the universe.*

Now that is some authority! This kind of authority is much different than anything we have ever encountered. The Greek word used here for “authority” comes from the root word “to exist.” Understand then that Jesus’ authority is not a gift, or a clipboard, given to Him by God. There is nothing external about this authority. This is an inner power that makes up who Jesus inherently is. So when He says, “Go,” He has the inherent authority to back up that command.

There’s the story of a battleship that was on maneuvers. Dense fog shrouded the vessel, so the captain remained on the bridge keeping an eye on all activities. Shortly after dark, the lookout in the tower reported, “Light bearing on the starboard bow.”

“Is it steady or moving astern?” the captain called out.

The lookout replied, “Steady, Captain.” This meant the battleship was on a dangerous collision course with whatever was emanating this light.

The captain told the signalman to send out a message, “We are on a collision course. Advise you change course twenty degrees.”

A reply quickly came back, "Advisable for you to change course twenty degrees."

The captain, getting a bit angry, told the signalman to send another message, "I'm a captain, change course twenty degrees."

"I'm a seaman second-class," came the reply. "You had better change course twenty degrees."

By this time, the captain was furious. He yelled to his signalman, "Send: 'I'm a battleship. Change course twenty degrees.'"

Back came the response, "I'm a lighthouse."

The captain quickly changed course.

Jesus is the Lighthouse, immovable and with complete authority. So when He says, "Go," what should we do? When He says, "You are salt. You are light. Get on a stand and shine," what should we do?

The Authority Given Us

Not only does Jesus have the authority to command us, but He has given us that same authority to help us fulfill His commands. Remember me with my clipboard? What gave me the right to tell a fellow employee what to do? It wasn't the clipboard. What gave me the authority was the fact that a manager gave me a job to do. As I stated earlier, the one in

charge had charged me with a task, and he had given me the authority and the resources necessary to accomplish the job.

Jesus has done the same for us. The one in charge of the universe has charged us with a task, and He has given us all the authority we need to complete it. This authority, again, is not simply an external gift that just adds to our present state. It is an inner power that should transform who we are. Let's quickly look at the difference between God's gift of authority and man's gift of authority.

In Genesis 41, Pharaoh gave Joseph his signet ring, an external gift that was the symbol of his power. With the giving of this ring to Joseph, Pharaoh was basically saying, "You are representing me now. You have my authority. I am putting you in charge."

Further, in Esther 8, King Xerxes would give his signet ring, the symbol of his power, to Mordecai. In essence, he too was saying, "You are representing me now. You have my authority. I am putting you in charge."

But these were external gifts, faint representations of what God had in store for his people. When God gives authority, it is never something external. In Haggai 2:23, God would tell Zerubbabel, the one He would use to lead the Israelites out of the Babylonian captivity, "*You are* My signet ring." Notice the difference. God doesn't give Zerubbabel

some external gift, some external representation of His power, No, instead He says, “You *are* My signet ring. Who you are represents Me. My authority is in you now!”

Because of this, we do not need to fear going out into the world. As 1 John 4:4 states, *The Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.*

It’s not little old me fighting the battle alone. I’m not simply wearing a ring, a ring that could be lost or stolen. I *am* the ring. I don’t simply have God’s authority. God’s authority is in me. It is making up who I am. It is this authority that will enable me to be a world changer.

Change the World

Perhaps we look at all that needs to be accomplished, slump our shoulders, and cry out, “How can we ever do all of that?!” The answer comes from Jesus. He reminds us that we are not going alone. We are going with His authority flowing through us. We need not fear rejection or hatred or anger or bitterness.

These may occur, but how do they match up against our Lord’s complete authority? We are the ones going in absolute power. Those who would stand against us have no such power. Oh, but how easily we act as though we are powerless.

Complete authority is ours. We have been given it from the Lord Himself. He is filling us with all that is necessary to accomplish the work of “continually going,” of “continually baptizing,” and of “continually teaching.” We may get tired and exhausted. We may feel alone and dejected. We may even be on the verge of surrender, but the words of the Lord come back to us: *I have been given complete authority.*

When we are overwhelmed by the thought of so many without hope, we can remember: *I have been given complete authority.* When we are tempted to give up because it seems like no one wants to hear the message, we can remember: *I have been given complete authority.*

Jesus gave these words to His followers to motivate them to press on. He wanted them to know they were not a helpless little group of uneducated tradespeople who had to take on the powerful Roman Empire. Jesus let His followers know He had all the authority. Therefore, if they travelled in His name, they had all of the authority. It wasn't them versus the mighty Roman Empire. It was Almighty God versus the Roman Empire. In that battle, God wins.

If we look to the Book of Acts, we see that the Early Church did continually “go” and “baptize” and “teach.” They took Jesus’ authority, went into a hostile world, and brought salvation. They were indeed world changers!

It is a work that still is necessary. It is a work that is still desperately needed. There are still people who are lost. There are still people who need Jesus, and He would have us go and get them.

In one of the very last sermons he ever preached, an eighty-nine year old John Wesley spoke on this very topic. He had started Methodism some sixty years earlier with just three others. By his eighty-ninth birthday, there were over a million Methodists all around the world. He could have looked at this and retired in contentment, but he did not. At nearly ninety, he was still preaching and teaching. And in one of his last sermons, he spoke out of Luke 14:15-24. In that portion of Scripture, Jesus is telling a parable about a man who is preparing a great feast.

This man sends his servant out with many invitations, but all of those invited guests make excuses and refuse to come. Because of this, the man sends his servant out again with this charge, *“Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the city and invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.”*⁹

The servant rushes out and does so. But even after inviting all of those, the servant comes back and reports, “Still there is room!”

So his master commands him, *“Go out into the*

country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full.”¹⁰

John Wesley, despite the fact that he had seen thousands upon thousands come to the banquet, shouted out to the crowd with tears streaming down his face, “And still there is room! And still there is room!”

There will always be room until the last day. Therefore, we must be continually going out, bringing them in, baptizing them as a symbol of their fellowship with God and with us, then teaching them to obey all of His commands.

Jesus is With Us

Again, this is no easy process. It is hard. It takes time. It can be daunting, even frightening. Jesus knows all of this, so He ends the Great Commission with amazing words of encouragement. He says, *“And be sure of this, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

He lets us know that He is with us. Not only do we have Jesus’ authority, we have Him! We are never alone in our Kingdom work. He is with us every step of the way. What a comfort that should be.

I remember a time when my father took me to the movies when I was just nine years old. What he didn’t know was that the movie was actually incredibly frightening. (This

was back in the day before everybody and their brother reviewed movies.) For this nine year-old, it was down-right terrifying! I was scared leaving the theater in broad daylight. By the time the evening rolled around, there was no way I was sleeping in my room alone!

My father, sensing the “trauma” he had caused, allowed me to sleep in the master bedroom, which I thankfully did for about three or four nights. For those few nights, I slept with no fear at all. Why would I fear? I knew my father was right there in the room with me. He would protect me from all harm.

Jesus, in His final words, is giving us the same kind of comfort. He is letting us know that He is right there with us, and not just for an overnight visit. He is with us always, to the end of the age. Not only is He with us, but He has also given us authority. An authority that nothing can conquer, and no one can take away.

Are You Ready for the Next Step?

Jesus commands us to be world changers. He commands us to be salt, to be light, to get on a stand and shine, and to build bridges to the world. These may seem like daunting tasks, but we are not working alone. Jesus promised to be with us through it all and never to leave those seeking to

do His will.

Complete authority belongs to Jesus. And now, He has given it to us. The question is: What will we do with it? Will we use it to change the world? I hope your answer is “YES!”

- Don't let your next step be closing out this book and moving on with life as usual. Get on your knees and tell the Lord you want to be a world changer
- Don't just tell the Lord. Tell someone else as well. You are more likely to follow through if you have some accountability. It can be your spouse, your best friend, your small group, your pastor, or someone else. The important thing is that you tell them within the next twenty-four hours
- Sit down and create a “wish list.” Write out what you would love to do for the Lord if money or time was not an issue. Money and time are *not* issues for God, so write out the list and begin praying through it each day
- Also be mindful that what you want to do for the Lord may not be what He wants you to do. Remember His will trumps your own. Stay in prayer, asking the Lord to show you what your next steps should be

THINK IT THROUGH QUESTIONS

How would a deep sense of the authority Christ has given help you in your task to be a world changer?

It is quite common for Christians and churches to focus on just “getting people saved.” However, Jesus is commanding us to do much more. What does it mean to “make disciples?”

Knowing that Christ has promised to be with you always, how can this help you fulfill Jesus’ commands today?

EPILOGUE

As you read earlier, each minute 108 people die. Today, nearly 156,000 people will die. With only about one third of the world's population being Christian, that means roughly 105,000 of those who die will go to Hell—that's just today. Think about it. Almost 105,000 human beings will start their eternity in Hell today.

Indeed, there is much in our world that needs changing. So many things, in fact, that it seems virtually insurmountable. Yet, in the midst of it all, there is great hope. Let me leave you with one of the most encouraging verses in all of Scripture.

1 Corinthians 2:9 states, *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.*

Whenever I read this verse, I am blown away. We

could literally fall into depression thinking of all the things that are wrong in our world, yet what God has in store to do about it, through us, is beyond our imagination!

Doesn't that blow your mind?

Think of it. God wants to do things through us that no one can even think of right now. That is truly amazing. We can all be world changers, impacting our planet one needy soul at a time. If you are on board with that, I guarantee you the ride of a lifetime!

Finally, if you have been touched in any way by this book, please do me the favor of writing a positive review on Amazon. Your review may inspire someone else to grab this book and become a world changer!

God bless you on your world changing journey!

APPENDIX

1. Kinlaw, Dennis *The Mind of Christ* Warner Press/Francis Asbury Press; 2 edition; July 15, 2010
2. Stowell, Joseph *The Trouble with Jesus* Moody Publishers; New edition; May 1, 2004
3. Lewis, Robert *The Church of Irresistible Influence* Zondervan; February 1, 2001
4. Blackaby, Henry; King, Claude *Experiencing God* B&H Publishing Group; January 2, 2014
5. IBID
6. Acornley, John Holmes *A History of the Primitive Methodist Church in the United States of America* Rev. N.W. Matthews, Publisher; 1909
7. IBID
8. Kinnaman, David *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* Baker Books; Reprint edition; April 1, 2012
9. Matthew 28:18-19
10. Mark 16:15
11. Luke 24:47
12. Luke 14:21
13. Luke 14:23

