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Learning to Love, Serve,

LIKE

and Influence Our Divided World

ME

Eric Bryant

FOREWORD BY ERWIN RAPHAEL MCMANUS AND JOHN BURKE

Racial Reconciliation Sample

Order the paperback or Kindle version of the complete book at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).
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What others are saying about *Not Like Me*:

“As a new follower of Jesus this book inspired me to live the kind of life Jesus calls us to live. Jesus is the original diversity practitioner, loving and welcoming all to Him, and *Not Like Me* inspires us to follow His lead. Thank you, Eric, for reminding us to live this powerful and essential message.”

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“Eric Bryant is a Catalyst! He lives with reckless abandon in the constant pursuit of knowing, leading and becoming more like Jesus, and representing a fresh expression of the Gospel to those around him. You will experience what relational evangelism could, should and does look like in the pages of *Not Like Me*. A great read for leaders, young and old. Plan to walk away refreshed, energized and equipped with new lenses through which to see the world, your community, and your friends.”

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“*Not Like Me* is all about the heart and the how of evangelism. Bryant’s style and substance reflect a refreshing departure from ineffective, shame based witnessing techniques...and a return to the simple and compelling compassion of Christ.”

- Steven Furtick, author of *Crash the Chatterbox* and *Greater*, Lead Pastor, Elevation Church, Charlotte, NC

“This book could have also been called, ‘Missional Living for Dummies.’ It is a must read for anyone who wishes to live for Jesus in urban post-Christian America.”

- Dave Bruskas, author of *Dear Son*, and Preaching Pastor, North Church in Albuquerque, NM

“The book was easy to read, but it doesn’t mean that you can finish it in one session of light reading. It provokes a lot of questions and a self-examination. It was funny, and like any other funny writings, it draws you to read with expectations; then it surprises you. Also it was a special kind of humor since the author was tickling us with a tip of a sword. It is a new type of prophetic writing. It confronts strongly without being judgmental, and it doesn’t impose standards that are unapproachable. On the opposite the general spirit of the book is ‘Yes, we can live this productive and meaningful life among any kind of people.’ I’m encouraged a lot reading the book and encouraging others to do so, and focused my life once again on the things that count.”

- Hany Fouad, Director of Arab Ministry in Spain

Not Like Me : Learning to Love, Serve, and Influence Our Divided World

Dr. Eric Michael Bryant

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Foreword by Erwin McManus

Twenty-five years ago, we began our first cultural experiment in diversity. A handful of us committed ourselves to creating a place that did not simply welcome people different from ourselves but instead pursued them. It was a simple concept really: love knows no boundaries.

We were privileged to break down barriers that had for too long defined and maligned the church. As a Latin American, I knew all too well what it feels like to be the outsider. It is a strange thing to be invited into the kingdom but not always into the church. I also discovered that often, when invited into the church, the same opportunities for leadership were not afforded me as they were for others. I never put it in the category of racism or even prejudice; I simply accepted that all of us recognize the value of people similar to us more readily than the value of those who are different.

I have reluctantly accepted that after 9/11 I will spend my life as one who is subject to random search (especially when I don't shave), yet as quickly as I am now to be targeted for a pat down, I had been throughout my life as likely to have been overlooked for having leadership potential.

I am convinced that this is the leadership challenge for the twenty-first century: It is not whether we can embrace diversity or accept and love people who are different from us; it is whether we will be able to identify and reach the future leaders of the world.

The challenge we face is more than how to add some color to our churches. The future of our churches and the vitality of the movement of Jesus Christ hinge on this very issue. Christianity's credibility rests on the church's resolve to not only embrace the differences in people but to celebrate and unleash them.

For the last fifteen years, we have been a part of a community that has come to be known as Mosaic. Mosaic is a tribe of over eighty nationalities that have converged in the city of Los Angeles. In a city known for racial and ethnic polarization, something beautiful—something miraculous—has transpired. The city that inspired the Academy Award – winning film *Crash* has within her womb the birth of hope for its masses. It was here that Rodney King asked, “Can't we all just get along?”

Eric Michael Bryant answers this question; and what's more, he tells us how we can make it happen. And he isn't speaking from theory but from practice. Eric is an anomaly at Mosaic. He's a very white—and I mean very, very white—bald guy! If there ever would have been the experience of reverse discrimination, it would have been here. Yet no one has exhibited more cross-cultural dexterity and adaptation than he has. This capacity, as well as his uncanny leadership gifts, has positioned him to serve on our navigator team with me over the past several years. Eric has been an incredible gift to me and to Mosaic and the kingdom at large. His leadership and

influence are invaluable not only to us here in LA; they reach across the world.

Here at Mosaic we give our leadership team superhero names. Eric's is "Stealth" - our attempt to describe his unique ability to lead without being seen. Eric is a master of invisible leadership. He has learned the true art of leading leaders. This gift mix informs his writings and makes his contribution even more significant. Eric knows what he's talking about, and he practices what he preaches. He has been writing this book for several years; I'm just glad he finally wrote it down.

Not Like Me is *Saving Private Ryan* meets *Nacho Libre*! Eric calls us to a heroic mission and at the same time exposes our flawed humanity. He tackles one of the most critical and complex issues of our time and brings it down to earth and keeps us grounded in reality. It's quite a gift to force us to face such uncomfortable and serious issues and at the same time to keep us laughing. Somebody needed to write this book; I am grateful that Eric did. We will all be better as a result.

Thank you, Eric, for awakening in us a love that knows no boundaries.

- Erwin Raphael McManus 2007

Erwin is an iconoclast known as a cultural pioneer for his integration of creativity and spirituality. Erwin is a storyteller and observer of life. Erwin is lead pastor of Mosaic in Los Angeles and author of *The Barbarian Way*, *Soul Cravings*, *The Artisan Soul*, and many other books.

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Foreword by John Burke

About seven years ago, I noticed God directing my attention to see something I hadn't noticed. "Do you see what I'm doing?" kept forming as a question in my mind as God opened my eyes. Everywhere I would go I would notice—Indians, Arabs, Chinese, the nations. It was as if the Lord had tuned my reticular activating system to see what He was doing. The reticular activating system is that part of your brain that tells you what's important to you and what's not—it's why when you're thinking of buying a black Mazda, all you see are black Mazdas everywhere! I started to pray for the nations all around me, and as I did, I felt the Holy Spirit reminding me how much He cares deeply for all people... "For God so loved...*the whole world*...that He gave His one and only son so that all who believe in him will not perish but have everlasting life."

I joined a soccer team in my neighborhood, playing Futsal, a Brazilian-style of soccer played on a basketball court with small goals. I play with guys from all over the world—Honduras, Guatemala, Algiers, France, Russia, Jamaica, Brazil, England, Afghanistan, Morocco—these are all guys I've gotten to know the past few years.

During this same timeframe, God did two other things to realign my reticular activating system. God brought Eric Bryant to Gateway church leadership, and we started asking in our yearly survey, "What nation are you from?" We discovered close to 60 nations now represented in our church here in Austin, Texas! God is bringing the world to us—do you see what He's doing around you?

In the decade since *Not Like Me* was first written, the need for a Christian guide into our diverse world has skyrocketed exponentially. Dr. Eric, as I like to call him, left Mosaic Church in culturally diverse Los Angeles and came to Austin, Texas where he leads Gateway Church in south Austin. The world is coming to America, but will the church have eyes to see and the cultural dexterity to influence the world around us? Eric's passion and expertise is helping the church do just that. Having served side by side with Eric for the past six years, I can attest that Eric is the most humble, adept Christian leader to guide the church to be like Jesus to an increasingly non-white, non-Christian world. And we must—because Jesus came for that very reason.

Do you see the world all around you? God's bringing the world to your city and mine, but I fear the church has its reticular activating system noticing other things—focusing us on racial division, on politics, on fear, on our own internal struggles, or just on ourselves. *Not Like Me* helps refocus us on what matters most to Jesus. Jesus made it really clear that His love and grace are to be extended to all the nations. Over 500 times in the Bible, God speaks about "the nations." Jesus was the fulfillment of God's very purpose for calling Abraham and Sarah and creating the Jewish people, "to be a blessing to all the nations" (Gen. 12:1-3). Jesus's first followers were sent out—sometimes forced out by persecution—from what was comfortable, so that they would

take God's good news to the nations. "Go and make disciples of *all the nations*..." (Matt. 28:19), "When the Holy Spirit comes you will receive power to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the *ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). And when all is said and done, God's plan for all the nations will be accomplished, and we will see people "from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne..." (Rev. 7:9). Do you see what God is doing all around you?

Not Like Me is a brilliant field guide to help leaders and all Christ followers understand how to engage with and influence a diverse world. Eric tackles the topics of diversity that frighten most Christians and cause them to withdraw from the world around them: racial differences, cultural differences, religious differences, sexual differences, political differences. With a firm grounding in scripture, Eric helps us know how to bring light into the darkness rather than just curse the darkness. *Not Like Me* helps us understand the positive side of difference, which we need to truly understand the Creator. The diversity of humanity forces us to take God out of our culturally sterile boxes to see how differences teach us about God and ourselves. We recommend *Not Like Me* to all our leaders and to every Christ follower because following God's lead into a diverse world not only grows us to be more like Jesus, it brings the life and freedom of Christ to the world around us. I've benefited greatly from Eric's wisdom and leadership—our whole church has—and I know you will, too, as you put *Not Like Me* into practice.

- John Burke 2017

John is the Senior Pastor at Gateway Church in Austin, the founder of GatewayLeaders.com, and author of *No Perfect People Allowed*, *Imagine Heaven*, and *Soul Revolution*, among others.

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Introduction

The Art of Woo: Overcoming the Christian Stereotype

I have a confession to make: I am a bald white guy (BWG) living in a world of color. It was not always this way, as I used to have hair and I used to live in the suburbs in Texas. While I had a great childhood and hope to provide my kids a similar kind of life, I realize that the world they are experiencing is very different from the world I knew growing up. Los Angeles in the new millennium and suburban Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, in the 1980s are in the same country but not quite the same universe. The world is changing dramatically, and as a result, we cannot live the same way, hiding in our own cul-de-sacs, staying away from others who look or believe differently from the way we look or believe, because now they live next door.

Living in Los Angeles as a BWG opened my eyes to how others who may not look like everyone else must feel. I don't feel I look unusual. Sure, I know it was odd to be bald in my early thirties. It was even stranger to be losing hair in high school. (In fact, the one actual bald kid in our high school approached me one day and whispered in my ear, "Stop using your hair dryer." I should have realized that when someone who is follicly challenged gives you hair-care advice, you should immediately contact Rogaine.)

In the late 1990s, while I was working as the youth pastor at Mosaic in East Los Angeles, I was often confused with either a "cholo" (the shaved-head gangsters of East LA) or a skinhead (some sort of neo-Nazi). Of course, neither was true, and I despised the assumptions others made about me just because of my appearance. To eliminate any confusion, I avoided wearing bandannas, super-baggy pants, and swastikas. One teen made me feel a little better, but still a bit odd, as he offered to shine my head for a quarter every time I saw him.

Ironically, I probably wouldn't be bald today if I wasn't a Christian. Sounds funny, but it's true. At the very least, I know I wouldn't have gone bald so quickly. One of our youth workers encouraged me to offer to shave my head if the youth group brought seventy-five kids to an upcoming event.

Now, working with teens in a church requires one to make great sacrifices, one of which is dignity. I honestly don't know why youth groups across the nation seem to enjoy shaming their youth leaders. In an effort to coerce teens to come to events, youth leaders have been known to dye their hair, eat pig snouts, and wear adult diapers, among various other humiliating experiences. I don't remember Jesus offering such ridiculous incentives, but I suppose if we could walk on water or feed five thousand people spontaneously, we probably wouldn't be resorting to such crazy attempts to get the attention of our teens.

Seventy-five kids were fifty more than we averaged, so I thought I would be safe.

I'm not sure why seeing me get my head shaved was more motivational than reaching out to their friends with the life-changing message of Jesus, but seventy-eight teenagers showed up that night.

With the razor humming, they shaved my head as everyone in the crowd screamed with delight—that is, everyone except my wife, Deborah, who feared my hair wouldn't grow back. Ridiculous thought, huh? Perhaps we should consider Deborah a prophetess, for her prediction came true. Angry with me for agreeing to such a foolish dare, my already-thinning hair refused to return. The recession had turned into a complete retreat.

But at least bald is a cool look. It is still cool to be bald, right?

Changing Views

Growing up in the Bible Belt gave me a unique perspective on life. I moved away from the South in 1994, but since I spent most of my school years there, I feel I have some insider knowledge of Christian culture.

Things have changed in some parts of the South, but when I was there, everyone claimed to be a Christian. For the most part, the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant worldview shaped the culture. In many ways I enjoyed and benefited from this environment growing up. Many amazing people influenced me and helped guide me spiritually. Even in public schools we would celebrate Christmas and Easter, while staying away from Halloween. We learned a great deal about the world in which we lived from a Christian and Western perspective.

Unfortunately, since *everyone* seemed to be a Christian, I discovered that for many their faith remained more cultural than real. They cheered for the Dallas Cowboys, went out to eat at Chili's, and attended church because that's what Texans do. After seeing friends struggle through life-altering situations and decisions, I saw a genuine disconnect between what people said they believed and how they lived. Since the cultural peer pressure remained so strong, these struggles remained private, driving them further and further from the people who could help them, such as their parents or church leaders. Either those struggling felt judged by those around them, or the cultural pressure to be "good Christians" kept them from becoming authentic and vulnerable.

While attending Baylor University, I developed friendships with young men and women who seemed to have moved beyond this framework. They longed to change the world as followers of Christ who saw their mission field as the hospitals, schools, businesses, firms, or organizations in which they planned to work. I had always thought that Christians were supposed to stop sinning and attend church, so they could then donate money to the pastor so he could lead people into a relationship with God. Some of these radical college students I met actually wanted to be a part of serving

others *personally* rather than paying someone else to do it. They wanted to contribute, participate, and even lead the charge. As I watched some of my friends start churches, businesses, ministries, and nonprofit mission organizations, I looked for my own place to risk and to sacrifice.

Their enthusiasm inspired me and ultimately changed the course of my life. My ultimate goal for college was to earn a degree so I could get a job, get married, buy a house, and raise my kids in a safe, comfortable, and Christian environment, but my experiences caused me to change this goal. When I began helping at a boys' home for kids in foster care and later worked as a youth pastor at a church that included primarily Anglo senior citizens in a diverse and transitional neighborhood, I had the opportunity to meet people who were overlooked far too often. In a sense, I realized that I had experienced so much love from God and from my family, friends, and teachers that I wanted to share this love with others. There were times I felt guilty for what I had, but this short-term motivation was replaced by gratitude. The love I had received fueled me to give to others.

My eyes were opened to a very different reality from my suburban childhood as I lived and traveled outside of the Bible Belt. Whether I was serving in an economically challenged neighborhood in Brazil or on a mission trip in Mexico, helping to plant a church in Seattle, traveling to Europe to consider serving the immigrants from the Muslim world, moving to Los Angeles to volunteer at a church called Mosaic, traveling to Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, or Malaysia, or living in "weird" Austin, I have encountered people who not only do not pretend to be Christians; they, in fact, despised Christians. There are many places where a negative Christian stereotype has become prevalent and continues to spread.

The Christian Stereotype

We all encounter assumptions based on the stereotypes others have of us. People have preconceived ideas about us based on our appearance, skin tone, gender, choice in clothing, background, behavior, and even beliefs - and, of course, if we are honest, we make assumptions about others as well. Just as being a BWG in LA created some challenges and even closed some doors, those of us who call ourselves Christians face the daunting task of overcoming others' perceptions of us in a world that sees us in a less than positive way.

With our religious heritage as a nation, "in God we trust" on our coins, "one nation under God" in our pledge, Christians have seen the United States as a nation filled with "good" Christians and "bad" Christians, unaware of the growing number of Muslims, Buddhists, Taoists, animists, atheists, cultists, and Hindus now living in the United States. I am not simply referring to those who move here from other countries, bringing their religions with them, although there are a lot of people who fit this description. I am also referring to the Christians who have walked away from the religion of their parents or grandparents to adopt a new way of seeing the world. More

and more people see Christianity as part of their past rather than as a guiding force for their future.

The fading influence of Christianity is not unique to the United States. In the last century, Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, among other nations, have experienced a decline in the number of people interested in participating in a local church. In the last twenty years or so, South Korea's enormous churches have begun to dwindle in size as young people have stopped attending church services. How has this happened? How could "Christian" nations find themselves so rapidly and radically reshaped? Sure, there are glimpses of great things happening around the world—places where new churches are springing up and reaching new people in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and even pockets of the Middle East. And if we look closely enough, we can also see good things happening in the Western world. But why does it seem that so many are rejecting Christianity and wanting nothing to do with Christians while maintaining a high level of respect for Jesus?

More and more people seem to have the same attitude as the bumper sticker I would see from time to time on cars around town: "Jesus, protect me from your followers." Who is to blame for this anti-Christian bias? Is it the media? Is there a liberal conspiracy? Is it Arianna Huffington or Al Franken? Perhaps we can place the blame on the Supreme Court's putting an end to mandatory prayer in public schools in 1962, or making abortion legal in 1972, or allowing too many immigrants into the country in the previous decade or so.

In reality, if we are completely honest, many of us who call ourselves Christians are to blame. We have created an environment where we are seen as judgmental, irrelevant, mean, and hypocritical.

Sure, the gospel is a challenging message to share, but it is not the gospel that is turning people away from church. Most people don't like to be called sinful or to be told their eternal destiny won't be fun-filled, but typically our actions rather than our convictions have created this negative stereotype. I have met many people who have walked away from the church of their childhood in order to find "freedom." After years in youth ministry, I have learned from other youth leaders and discovered for myself the challenge of keeping teenagers connected to church after they graduate from high school. If we added up the number of people who stopped believing in God because they stopped enjoying church when they were in junior high or even twelve years old or younger, we would be shocked at how many walk away from the faith of their parents.

I can relate to the kid who finds himself forced to go to a place he does not enjoy. In my younger days, there were times I would sneak away from the church building to jump on a neighbor's trampoline. Other times I would fake an illness on Sunday morning to avoid going to church because of the boring music and boring sermons. Miraculously, when I was seventeen, I encountered God personally as I sensed Jesus

inviting me to fully trust him with my life, yet the church was still something I had to endure, one of the sacrifices God was calling me to make. There were moments when I caught glimpses of what could be, especially at camp or in college, but the weekly routine remained less than inspiring.

After graduating from college, I moved to Seattle then to Los Angeles and now to Austin, to be part of churches that acknowledged and addressed our ever-changing world. With several trips to Mexico, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Korea, and China, I have yet to find a perfect church. Instead, there certainly are communities of faith that are expressing the eternal truth of God in ways that can be understood in our new world. Too often, these communities seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

Many times, what we Christians perceive as persecution from the world is actually the direct result of our own mindless or even evil decisions. For one, we have a sordid past. In the name of Christianity, people have destroyed civilizations and forced conversions. The Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the “civilizing” of North America, and our participation in slavery don’t look good on our résumé as Christians. Like you, I don’t claim that these parts of Christian history are based on God’s love and his principles, but I cannot help wondering what we are currently doing or not doing that will cause us to feel ashamed in the future.

For far too long, the world has been made aware of what we as Christians hate rather than whom we love. When asked what Christians believe, most people would begin creating a “Don’t Do” list. People are far more aware of what Christians are against than of what we support. Rather than hearing a call for true freedom, people feel unloved by Christians and therefore unloved by God because of our behavior.

We tend to judge people who do not know Christ by the same standards we have for ourselves. We should not be surprised when people who have not surrendered their lives to God live differently. If we struggle to measure up to our high standards with God’s help and intervention in our lives, how can we possibly have the same expectations for others who have not sought or received God’s forgiveness and strength? It’s like getting mad at Stevie Wonder for not waving at us when we walk past him.

Our personal relationships often betray our feelings for the world as well. Rather than befriending and loving those who do not yet follow Christ, it seems that the longer we follow Christ, the fewer people we actually know who believe differently from the way we believe. We have created our own world within a world, a bubble in which we live with everything we need: Christian books, Christian shirts, Christian music, Christian jewelry, Christian movies, Christian sports leagues, Christian stores, Christian video games, and even Christian mints. I’m all for entrepreneurial ventures, but I’m afraid we have (inadvertently or perhaps sometimes purposely) isolated ourselves from the world around us. Perhaps there are some who have been reached by

reading a T-shirt with “God’s Gym” on the front, finding a gospel tract on a urinal, or attending events featuring Christian bands, but most of the time we forget the importance of reaching out to others through these experiences. Instead, we choose to enjoy these events as an alternate reality outside of the rest of culture.

Some of our churches have so consistently become a refuge for Christians from the world that we fail to become communities that go out into the world, or even communities where seekers feel free to come and explore the possibility of a God who loves them and has a plan for their lives. We’ve even created our own language that now requires translation: Christianese. Our isolation from the world fails to communicate God’s concern for those around us but instead communicates that we do not want others in our lives who do not know Christ.

In conversations with people who have rejected Christianity, many times they have mentioned racism, conflict, hypocrisy, and even a lack of compassion as key reasons. For years, we’ve all heard that the eleven o’clock hour on Sunday mornings is “the most segregated hour of the week,” yet what have we done to change this? When the world sees us fighting among ourselves with church splits or hears of another pastor who embezzled money or left his wife, we just prove to them that we have nothing more to offer than what they are already experiencing. When non-Christians are moved to help those who are underprivileged, they volunteer at Goodwill or at a downtown homeless shelter. Serving the community rarely equates in people’s minds with volunteering with a local church. Too few of us are engaging the very real needs we should be meeting while inviting our spiritually open friends, family members, coworkers, and neighbors to join us.

The Art of Woo

If you are anything like me, you have moments when you dream of overcoming the Christian stereotype.

Deep down, I’d like to think, we long to be part of a loving and diverse community. We long to be part of a church known for caring for those the world has forgotten. We want to live out our lives of faith in ways that would please God and intrigue those around us. Wouldn’t it be amazing if people saw our lives and wanted what we have? Wouldn’t it be tremendous if people saw us living by faith, expressing love, and sharing hope?

Rather than coming across as judgmental, homogenous, isolated, conflict-filled, and irrelevant communities, we need to show the world what Christ truly intended us to be. We need to practice what I like to call “the art of woo.”

In the sixth century BC, Sun Tzu taught us how to destroy others in *The Art of War*.¹ Someone else has taught us how to manipulate people in *The Art of Seduction*, so why can’t we learn “the art of woo”?² I love The Gallup Organization’s definition

of woo: “winning others over.”³ The more common definition implies a romantic pursuit, one’s attempts to gain the affection of another person. Both descriptions are helpful for us in this journey. We need more woo. Since we are God’s children and representatives, those around us need to feel loved by us.

My hope is that these pages will inspire us to develop “the art of woo” so that we might learn to develop diverse communities, resolve conflict, overcome bitterness, create a better future, and even heal our fractured world. Wouldn’t it be amazing if as followers of Christ we found ourselves as part of the solution in our divided world rather than as part of the problem? In the end, don’t people matter most?

Signs of change are all around us. I am meeting more and more leaders who are determined to create communities that show and share Christ’s love in fresh ways in their cities. These leaders and communities have inspired me to believe in a new future.

Serving at Mosaic in Los Angeles was a life-changing experience. Whether volunteering in the parking lot, hosting a small group, working with teenagers or college students, or serving as part of the leadership team, I was continually amazed by Mosaic’s community. There are so many loving, sacrificial, talented, and courageous people from such varied backgrounds and diverse ethnically, socioeconomically, generationally, politically, and even spiritually. Stepping into this diverse community as outsiders in 1998, Deborah and I immediately felt welcomed and included. For the almost 13 years we served at Mosaic, I learned a great deal from our community and our leaders.

My desire is to live a life that embraces the people Christians love to hate. I want to bring light and gain influence among those who look differently, act differently, live differently, and believe differently. I want to overcome the Christian stereotype with love. I want those around me—whether or not they have a similar background and worldview—to be aware of God’s love through my words and my actions. I want to take Jesus seriously when he challenged us to love God and love our neighbor. I want to learn “the art of woo.”

This book is for those who want to join me and step through the fourth wall. Too often we live our lives as if we are on a stage. We want others to hear what we have to say and to watch us from afar. It’s as if the message of Jesus has come just to us rather than through us and into the lives of those around us. When an actor in a play looks at the audience, talks to the audience, and listens to the audience, he removes an invisible barrier: the fourth wall. They are no longer the audience, they are now part of the story.

God broke through the barriers between us when He walked among us. He invited us into the story when He asked the blind men what they needed from Him, invited the fishermen to follow Him, and healed the woman who pulled at His robe. Jesus

removed the barriers by entering our story and inviting us into His. Rather than making proclamations from far away, He came to us and invited us into a relationship.

This journey won't be easy. If you are anything like me, you seem to fail more often than you succeed. We will disappoint others and ourselves at times. Furthermore, actually reaching out to people and loving them can be painful and heartbreaking. In fact, there are people all over the world who are being genuinely persecuted, imprisoned, and even killed as they try to love those who do not want their love. It is far easier to remain isolated and spend time with those who already love us, but there are so many others who need to feel and experience authentic friendship.

We live in a diverse world filled with unprecedented opportunity. Now is the time for us to become agents of change creating genuine unity among people from a variety of backgrounds and worldviews. Through stories and insights gleaned from my own experiences and failures, the experiences of others, and the life and teachings of Jesus, my hope is that we will discover how to move beyond ethnic, racial, cultural, and ideological barriers toward genuine friendship with others.

6. White Men Can Jump (Just Not as High): Seeing Past Stereotypes

“God is worthy! Hallelujah! He is worthy! Hallelujah!”

Those of us in his vicinity tried not to stare, although he appeared to want the attention. “He sure picked an interesting place to perform,” I thought. We were in the terminal at Los Angeles International Airport, waiting for our direct flight from LAX to JFK in New York City.

At first his song had seemed unintelligible. After much straining, I could begin to understand the lyrics he was singing through his thick accent. His black shoes, slacks, and button-down shirt matched his black hair and mustache. The black hair on his arms covered his dark brown skin. He continued bellowing his tune for all to hear. He was alone, it seemed, yet why was he singing? He continued to pace back and forth as his song continued.

The date was September 19, 2001.

Eight days prior, the world had changed. As the next several days came and went, the story began to unfold. Hijackers. Terrorists. Osama bin Laden. Taliban. Heroes. Todd Beamer. New York City firefighters.

Everything was a blur during the course of those first few hours on September 11 and the following days, yet somewhere in the middle of it all, it hit me: Deborah, Caleb (two years old at the time), and I were flying into New York City to see friends and to speak at a youth conference the next week. Surely it would be canceled. I called the youth pastor to confirm my suspicions, but he told me that the students and the people in their church needed this retreat more than ever. Some people from his church had friends who had offices in the World Trade Center towers and who were still missing. He felt it would be good to have an outsider’s perspective of hope and trust in God in the midst of such devastation.

In addition to the natural numbness I had been feeling, I now felt fear. I was expected to fly just days after the airports were allowed to reopen. I was flying at about the same time of day, on one of the same airlines, and between the same airports. Surely the youth group would understand if we could not come. “If it were just me, of course I would come” (I said to myself, hoping that it was true), but since Deborah and my two-year-old son were planning to travel with me - it was the perfect situation: Deborah and Caleb would be the reason for my withdrawal, not my own fear.

Just as I had hoped, Deborah did not want to go. She hated flying (an attitude that predated 9/11), but she did feel we should pray and seek advice before deciding. After a couple of days of vacillating, we decided that we wanted to be a part of helping

people who were hurting. We began to feel that this was an opportunity God was placing before us and that he wanted us to respond in a spirit of trust and obedience.

Of course, we created an escape clause. I agreed with Deborah that if she did not feel comfortable flying to New York at any time before the trip, we would not hesitate to cancel our trip.

So then, up to this point in the days preceding the trip, all was proceeding smoothly. Once the Pavarotti wannabe chose to sing his own version of “This Is the Day,” things began to unravel for us.

Just as the terminal singer concluded his song so he could get in line with his friend, we noticed that the two men in front of us also had dark brown skin and jet-black hair. Upon closer inspection, I could hear them speaking a foreign language, which I assumed was Arabic. Worse yet, they seemed to be big fans of cellophane. Both of their suitcases were wrapped tightly with sticky plastic wrap. How could the airport security check for bombs? Wasn’t all of the luggage going to be opened and screened? We had arrived almost four hours ahead of our flight time because of the supposedly intense security. We watched as the woman at the gate checked in their bags and placed them on the conveyer belt. They were headed straight to the plane.

Deborah turned to me. “Didn’t those guys with the plastic-wrapped luggage look like they may be terrorists? Did you hear the song that guy was singing? These guys are plotting something!”

One of the advantages of marrying a woman who is prone to worry is that I get to be the courageous one. As she articulates what I am thinking, I have the chance to articulate the opposite. I become the more positive voice, even when I feel the same way she does, and most of the time I do.

Worrying seems to be in my genes. I have an aunt who once dialed 911 and hung up so that if she needed help while her husband was out of town she could just hit redial for a faster means of dialing. This was not a good idea as she discovered when an ambulance, fire engine, and police cars arrived to check on her. When I was a child, I wet my pants playing goalie in my first year of soccer because the entire field of five-year-olds started running toward me all at once. When I was ten, my doctor had me on a bland diet to alleviate the ulcers I was developing while playing baseball. As a pitcher, I was afraid of hitting the batter with the ball.

Somehow my verbal assurances that she was just being hypersensitive and that they were probably on a different flight backfired. Not only were these guys waiting to board our flight; another olive-skinned man was already in the waiting area when we arrived. The men did not sit together as they waited at the terminal—a strange thing since we had seen two of them talking with each other in the baggage line earlier. Deborah was sure that the men were exchanging glances with each other over the tops

of their newspapers and magazines. As one man seemed to wink at another, Deborah found her breaking point. She was still willing to fly to New York, but she did not want to go on this particular flight. She approached the woman at the counter to ask if there was an opportunity to transfer to the next flight.

“I’m sorry, ma’am, but your luggage is already on board this flight. We do not have time to remove your luggage. You will need to fly on this flight. We cannot allow you to switch.”

I tried to persuade Deborah that all would be OK in spite of the woman’s response. I tried to point out once again that these four men were probably not the people she thought they were. For a time she seemed to have discovered enough peace to get on this flight. She acknowledged to me that she was already afraid and that this experience was just accentuating her inner feelings.

As we boarded the plane, we noticed a disturbing scenario. The guy who had been singing was sweating profusely while wringing his hands and asking one of the flight attendants questions such as, “Can I move to the front of the plane? How many gallons of gas does this plane hold? Do we have enough gas in case we can’t land immediately in New York?”

When we finally reached our row, which happened to be filled with what we perceived as Al-Qaeda operatives, Deborah continued moving toward the back. She was carrying Caleb in her arms, and she had her own set of questions for another flight attendant. Unfortunately, this flight attendant seemed to be more upset by the current state of events than Deborah. As Deborah asked to be allowed to get off the plane and book a later flight, tears began to slide down her cheeks. The flight attendant empathized with Deborah; she was scared, too. Deborah was now more afraid than ever. She came back to me to invoke our escape clause. She was not going to fly on this plane. The flight attendant from the front of the plane approached us as we began gathering up our things. “I’m sorry, but you cannot leave this flight. Your luggage must travel with you. Please be seated so we can begin our flight.”

Now we were being held hostage by American Airlines employees wearing nametags and polyester dress suits. Terrified that the men seated in our row knew enough English to have understood our conversation, I bounced back and forth between looking straight ahead and looking at Deborah. I did not want to make eye contact with these guys, fearing that my family and I would be their first victims.

Within a few minutes, the flight attendant returned and asked us to gather our things. We were now going to be allowed to exit the plane—apparently we were scaring the other passengers.

Stereotypes

If we are honest with ourselves, we all have to admit that at times we find ourselves stereotyping others. We allow the words of others, bad experiences from our past, news reports, and even our fears to be projected onto others so that we form prejudicial judgments against others. None of us like to be seen in light of a stereotype, but we do not seem to hesitate to do the same to others. Think of the last time you made a decision or chose a course of action based on a stereotype of another person. It's quite likely that you won't have to remember back too far into your past.

After getting off that particular flight at LAX, we got on the next flight. This flight also had men and women from Arab heritage, yet without the singing and the cellophane, we were able to ride with relative peace (as much peace as possible on a plane in that time in history). Of course, the other plane had been filled not with terrorists but with scared men, just like us. We had allowed the images of Al Qaeda operatives to move our minds to lump into their category all one billion Muslims and anyone with a hint of Middle Eastern heritage. Too often we assume the worst in others, limiting the possibilities of others based on their appearance. I'm thankful that Caleb is too young to remember this lapse in our lives because so often our children and those we influence absorb and live out the same stereotypes we hold.

Stereotypes exist because we do not form friendships with others who differ from us.

We assume everyone from an entire ethnicity has the same character or idiosyncrasies. As a result, taxi drivers in New York or police officers in certain parts of the country racially profile others, targeting them on the basis of their race. Some taxi drivers don't stop for those with dark skin, while some police officers look for those with dark skin to stop.

In 2005, one night at dinner with some of the leaders of Mosaic, we began talking about racial profiling. One man shared about how a police officer slowly followed him when he was a teenager as he walked with his friends. After following them for quite a while, the police officer cautioned the white kids to be careful about hanging out with a "troublemaker." The "troublemaker" had never gotten into trouble with the law; he just happened to be Hispanic. Another leader spoke of the time the police pulled him over because he was a Latino driving a nice car. Apparently, he matched the description of a carjacking suspect. The officer let him go with a warning to "Watch your speed," even though he hadn't been speeding. (This is the same friend of mine who gets "randomly" searched at airports every time he sports a goatee, which doesn't happen when he is clean-shaven.)

One of the others told of the massacre of Chinese immigrants in Los Angeles about one hundred years ago, a story I knew little about. In October 24, 1871, after a Caucasian man had been accidentally shot and killed, many of the white residents

blamed the Chinese immigrants even though no one ever found the killer. Hundreds of Caucasians flooded into Chinatown, ransacking homes, robbing people, killing about twenty boys and men, and then hanging their bodies for all to see. Another friend at the table had family members who had experienced the Japanese internment camp during World War II. We talked about how Asian bias and stereotypes seem to continue today in less violent yet more subtle ways and how Hollywood seems to forget that Asians even exist. He mentioned that NBC's television show *Suddenly Susan*, which took place in San Francisco, a city populated with many Asian Americans, did not include one Asian in its cast or how another television show called *Joan of Arcadia*, which took place in Arcadia High School, included some very interesting characters such as Joan, who wrestled with her relationship with God, and her brother Kevin, who faced the challenge of paralysis after being hit by a drunk driver. However, *Joan of Arcadia* was strikingly devoid of Asian characters. The Arcadia High School I know in the LA area is in a predominantly Asian area, and about two-thirds of the students are Asian. He mentioned that the only times Asians seem to be on television or in films is when they are beating up someone with their martial arts moves or as a silly sidekick.

Everyone seemed to keep sharing more and more stories of how "the man" had let them or their people down. It was one of those moments when everyone is trying to share a story more impressive than the previous one. You know, the "Oh yeah? Well, one time . . ." kind of storytelling progressed around the table. I kept thinking to myself, "It's almost my turn. I've got to think of a good one. I'm the youngest one here, and I've got to fit in." As the only Caucasian guy at the table, I had a problem though. I look like "the man." The system had never betrayed me. When I got pulled over by the police, it was because I was actually speeding. After my mind came back with examples from working in East LA or teaching in downtown Los Angeles, I decided to simply ask questions. This was my chance to learn from friends who had a different experience in their interactions with others in this world. The stories were never bitter, just honest, as they casually shared about their experiences of being victims of a stereotype.

In extreme instances, stereotyping can have deadly results. Whether we've heard about it the news or not, too often people are targeted for violence because of the color of our skin.

In June of 2016, police shootings became an issue in which many Americans became much more aware.

Even in reading the phrase "police shootings," do you think first of the black men who have lost their lives or the officers who were shot and killed because of the uniform they wear? The fact the phrase sends us in one of two directions reminds us of how differently we may see the world at times.

After the tragic deaths of Alton Sterling, Philando Castile and the subsequent shooting of Dallas police officers and the deaths of Lorne Ahrens, Michael Krol,

Michael Smith, Brent Thompson, and Patricio "Patrick" Zamarripa, our hearts were heavy. Latasha Morrison, one of our key staff leaders at Gateway Church in Central Austin, led an evening of prayer for our people. As founder of Be the Bridge, a non-profit dedicated to helping "the church to have a distinctive and transformative response to racial division" (www.beabridgebuilder.com), as an African American woman, and as a follower of Jesus, she was the perfect person to lead us through a time of prayer for all that was happening in our world.

She called us as people of faith to be people who are against evil and injustice. In many ways, these tragedies pointed out the need for addressing prejudice and injustice towards people of color in all of our society beyond only law enforcement.

At the same time, she reminded us that police officers serve and protect us. The deaths of policemen in Dallas were devastating. The stories of police officers putting their lives at risk for those who were protesting the deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile in Dallas showed true heroism.

She asked the question: "If we are for supporting the police and against racial profiling and injustice, how can we respond?"

She then led us in prayers of lament and prayers of repentance. She challenged us that God's call to "Oneness" is not the same as a call to "Sameness." Her message was powerful, timely, and a guide for how we can respond to our broken world.

Just a few months prior to that, John Burke, the senior pastor at Gateway Church in Austin had asked me and Latasha Morrison to speak on the topic of "A Love Beyond Ethnicity" in the midst of a series called "Love Where You Live."

In that message, Latasha challenged us with the following:

"If we're honest, it's easy to love others who think like us and look like we do. We enjoy being in community with people who have shared experiences or belief systems. But if we all had that mindset and only associated with those like us, how would it benefit God's kingdom? How does loving those we deem unlovable benefit others? We need bridge builders because the message of Jesus is for everyone. When we stay in our own racial boxes, we leave room for harmful assumptions and dehumanizing stereotypes.... As we learn to build relational bridges, we will have the opportunity to connect others to the One who created us all and loves us all and gave Himself for us all."

Most of us do not act out violently against others based on their ethnicity, but what are we doing to ensure that this type of injustice stops? When we decide not to help solve the problem, we allow the momentum to continue toward injustice. In our family, we have a slogan: "Don't complain about anything you aren't willing to do

anything about.” This should be true in every area of our lives, not just when it comes to doing the dishes or experiencing conflict with a family member.

When we fail to befriend those who are not like us, we miss out. Remaining cocooned in our own little world with no desire to venture outside keeps us from experiencing many remarkable conversations, foods, scents, and dances. More importantly, fear keeps us from discovering many remarkable friendships. As followers of Christ, we need to actively befriend anyone God brings into our lives. Our world is becoming more and more diverse, so much so that to remain homogenous in our churches and in our friendships actually takes effort. Instead, we need to be more intentional to live out the second part of the Great Commandment, to love our neighbor, even those who look different from us. The nations are now living all around us and not just in our largest cities. God has moved people from around the world into our lives so that we may show Christ’s love. What about the people in India who have never heard about Jesus? Some of them just moved in down the street.

Sadly, as a religion, Christianity has not fared well when it comes to race relations. Those who claimed to follow Christ have attacked, oppressed, and killed Arabs during the Crusades, Jews during the Spanish Inquisition, Africans during the slave trade, and on and on we could go. Even more recently, white “Christians” with racist tendencies have seemed emboldened to oppress or even attack others because of their skin color. We may try to navigate the world with more political correctness, but what are we doing to show the world that we represent God’s love for all people?

Political correctness attempts to change the words we say, but it fails to change the way we feel. We act as though everything is OK on the surface, but are things really different?

Too often we seem to “yell” at those in our nation who have different values while failing to realize that we’re not upset about the right things. The world hears what we oppose very clearly; therefore, we need to begin voicing whom we support that much more.

“Refugees” From New Orleans

In 2005 thousands of men, women, and children were trapped by the floodwaters caused by Hurricane Katrina. With tears in their eyes as they stood in front of the many thousands of “refugees,” reporters shouted out what was happening. This was not some horrible tragedy befalling the people of Bangladesh or Pakistan. We were watching the city of New Orleans fight to survive. The “Big Easy” had become a big pool of toxic soup, forcing thousands upon thousands from their homes. As some were being rescued from their attics and others were waiting for food and water at the Superdome, stories of looting and raping—and even stories about “pirates” stealing boats—flooded the airwaves. With images of thousands of seemingly helpless people projected on our TV screens, we felt powerless to help. How could we let Americans—or anyone, for

that matter—endure so much? How could we allow so many days to pass without help from the government? How could we not have been better prepared for this type of catastrophe? What can we do to help even now?

Like most churches, at Mosaic we began spreading the word about ways to get involved in serving those who had been displaced by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. People gave thousands of dollars, and we mobilized about twenty people to go to Houston for ten days. Raising their own support and taking time off from work and school, these women and men went to serve at the Astrodome and the Reliant Center just days after the buses had arrived. Our team members ranged in age from their early twenties to mid-forties, and our team included some of our interns who had moved from the Midwest and South to serve in Los Angeles as well as several people who had grown up in Southern California. Thanks to the generosity of several churches in the Houston area, team members found housing and transportation and the opportunity to get involved directly with those seeking refuge after losing their homes. The group worked tirelessly in multiple ways, transporting families to the airport, bus station, and apartments; unloading supplies donated from people and organizations across the country; playing with the children; and so on.

Our group included Caucasians, Asian Americans, and one African American named Dawn. Something unfortunate began to happen to the team as the week transpired. As most of the group found open access throughout the work areas, Dawn kept running into barriers. The workers from the Red Cross and from FEMA would order Dawn to return to the Astrodome rather than allowing her to continue walking with the rest of her team. They were assuming that Dawn, being African American, needed help, rather than seeing her as someone who had come to give help. As the week continued, other workers kept on treating Dawn as a second-class citizen. The rest of the team from our church became more and more frustrated by the way Dawn was being treated, as well as by the way they sensed that government workers were treating the evacuees.

After spending several hours playing with children whose parents were out searching for new places to live, Dawn was approached by one of the workers and rebuked for spending time with these kids. (The worker didn't reprimand the white woman from our team who was playing with the kids as well.) As the conversation continued, the worker blurted out that she feared for the children's safety. She thought Dawn was befriending these children in order to kidnap them.

Hurricane Katrina rather strikingly revealed the racial tension in our nation that had been covered by a thin veil of political correctness. Many outspoken African Americans complained that the response had been slow because those needing help were black. Even the use of the term "refugee" seemed to expose that white America had been thinking of the inner city as a place filled with foreigners who needed help.

The media showed pictures of African Americans who were “looting,” while showing pictures of Caucasian people in New Orleans who were “finding food.”

Even though the response from predominantly white states in our country seemed to be overwhelmingly positive, there still seemed to be a mentality of “us” and “them.” Dawn experienced this firsthand in Houston. Almost all of the people who needed help appeared to be black Americans; almost all of the people providing help appeared to be white Americans. This imagery seemed to perpetuate the idea that black people need white people. Dawn did not fit that stereotype. As a result, people struggled to see her in any other capacity. Dawn was a black person serving as part of a multi-ethnic team helping those in need. She did not fit the box in which others wanted to place her.

All these years after Hurricane Katrina, have we made much progress?

Too often the church falls into a dangerous mindset. Either we hide from those who are different from us, or if we are motivated to help others, we like to help people as long as they don’t get too close. We may partner with churches of different ethnicities, yet we work together for a short time and from a distance. For example, members of a predominantly Caucasian church may feel good about themselves when they go into an inner-city neighborhood that is predominantly African American, or an African American church may take a mission trip into Mexico, but are we reaching out to those who are different from us and who live or work beside us?

And what about those around us who do not need our help? Are we getting to know those people who live in our community and whom we encounter at work no matter how different they may be from us? We need to move from meetings that just *talk* about racial reconciliation and actually create communities that show the world we can be reconciled.

A Glimpse of Heaven

“The great philosopher Rodney King once asked, ‘Can’t we all get along? Can’t we all just get along?’ We have proven throughout history that the answer to his question is ‘No!’ Throughout history, we have discovered we cannot get along with each other. Ironically, we seem to despise those who look just like us, not just those who do not.”

Erwin McManus, the lead pastor at Mosaic, was sharing these words with a predominantly white church in Orange County. The church had invited Erwin because they were very interested in becoming a diverse community, and they wanted to start a service for Latinos or Filipinos.

At that time, I had been volunteering at Mosaic for several months before being asked to serve in the youth ministry. I was facing some challenges as a white youth pastor of a primarily Latino youth group in East Los Angeles. In fact, Erwin found himself having to defend my appointment when one Latino leader had questioned why

he would choose a white guy for this position. In the midst of this transition, Erwin had invited me to join him as he spoke at this rather affluent church about reaching out to other ethnicities. I was listening attentively, hoping to learn anything that might help me in my new role.

As Erwin continued his talk that day, he pointed out the bitter and homicidal feuds between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, the Bosnians and Serbs in the Baltics, and the Protestants and Catholics in Ireland. Though we may not be able to discern the differences, those involved are very aware of those they hate with a murderous passion.

When Erwin asked all those in attendance who had coworkers or neighbors from different ethnic backgrounds to raise their hands, almost everyone did so. However, when asked how many of these coworkers or neighbors had ever been invited over for dinner, hands went down. The atmosphere in the room grew awkward as Erwin went on to say, “If you want to become a diverse church, you need to have friends from diverse backgrounds. Many of us say we want diversity but only if our children don’t marry their children.”

These well-meaning men and women wanted some tips for starting a service either for Latinos or for Filipinos. They were OK with this type of diversity. I even think they were willing to hear about racial reconciliation. The cold response from the crowd made me think that many people there were not quite ready to live out a life that is reconciled to others, but I must be careful; I could be stereotyping them.

Too often we can be too judgmental of people who are judgmental.

As human beings, we are extremely complex. We punch our younger brothers, but we defend them when they are attacked by others. We act as though we are being protective, but in reality maybe we simply want to maintain our privileges as the only ones allowed to beat them up. We huddle up in homogenous churches, yet we fight insatiably in those churches. In essence, we are all out for ourselves. If banding together with those who don’t look like us is more beneficial, then we do so; if hating those who don’t look just like us advances our own selfish cause, then so be it. I think we can all admit it: people are selfish. Without God’s help we will fight any who stand in our way within our community and especially those outside of it.

The early church miraculously moved toward inclusion in its early days. During Pentecost, the disciples experienced a linguistic miracle: they spoke in the languages of those who had come to Jerusalem for the holiday. Women and men from Libya, Rome, Egypt, Crete, Cappadocia, Mesopotamia, and “every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) were transformed by God. As a result, the church was born in diversity. Throughout history, diversity has continued in the universal church, but for the vast majority of local churches, diversity disappeared somewhere along the way. God’s passion has always been for the nations, as evidenced throughout the Scriptures from Genesis to

Revelation—from the time God chose Abraham in order to bless “all peoples on earth” (Genesis 12:3) to the song that acknowledges that Christ’s blood “purchased for God members of every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). In a time in history when “the nations” live together in the same cities, most of our churches remain homogenous. More often than not, it is not language that keeps us from each other; it is our unwillingness to make the necessary sacrifices to reach and empower the “nations” within our churches.

Recent solutions for ethnic tension do not go far enough. Tolerance has helped culture take steps in the right direction, but they it has not gotten us to where we should be. We end up acknowledging that another group has value, but we act as though their value is best appreciated from a distance.

Tolerance has often been touted as a great accomplishment. Leaders in politics, education, athletics, and business promote equality and integration, yet in practice we remain isolated from each other. To be sure, tolerance remains better than animosity, but it’s still not as good as genuine concern, care, and affection. None of us truly long to be tolerated; we all long to be loved. Tolerance allows us to survive; love allows us to thrive. As a global community, we need to break through tolerance and embrace love. When we become tired of tolerating others, we should try loving them.

An alternative option for some has been to become “color-blind,” but this strategy falls short since color blindness ignores an important part of a person’s identity. We should see beyond someone’s color so that we get to know the person; but to truly get to know a person, we need to find out what being black, brown, beige, or white is like. As Latasha has shared, “Rather than being ‘color blind,’ we need to become ‘color-brave.’”

Our ethnic background shapes us. At the same time, we are so much more complex than our appearance. Our families, our socioeconomic status, our personality, our strengths, our talents, our passions, and our experiences all make us unique.

I was fortunate to work with amazing people at Mosaic. At one point, we had two female leaders on our team named Dana—one was Dana Evans and the other Dana Elliott. Dana Evans is Caucasian, and Dana Elliott is African American. In addition to having offices next to each other, these two Danas were also roommates at the time. You can imagine how many times people confused one of them as the other one. One day I mentioned to Caleb, who was six years old at the time, that Dana was coming over to see him and his sister. My kids loved both Danas. Caleb looked at me with a curious expression as he asked, “Which Dana—the brown one or the peach one?” Six-year-old boys are not very politically correct, but it would have been silly for him to overlook their skin tone as a distinguishing characteristic. What was beautiful for me in that moment was that for Caleb the difference between the two wasn’t as stark as black and white; he saw them as different shades of brown.

In heaven, ethnic boundaries will not exist. So why are boundaries so prevalent on earth? After one of our Sunday gatherings at Mosaic, a non-Christian who was visiting noticed the diverse crowd and said, “If I believed in heaven, it would look like this.”

If we aren’t willing to diversify in order to connect to God’s heart, then we should be willing to diversify to show God’s heart to those in our lives who do not yet follow Christ. Our world is much more diverse. My daughter, Trevi, has a better chance of growing up to marry a Chen or a Ramirez than to marry a Smith or a Jones.

Furthermore, people are becoming more diverse themselves. Rather than representing just a mixture of European cultures, Americans are a blend of Latino, African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and European—sometimes all in one person. The path to diversity begins with the mission of Christ. When we choose to reach out and love everyone around us, we will experience a glimpse of heaven on earth.

7. The Untouchables: Learning To See Those We Overlook

Some of my friends had chosen to dig through a dumpster behind Pizza Hut for lunch. Dumpster-diving had not interested me that day. I might have been poor, but I liked to retain a certain level of cleanliness. Germs and I had never really gotten along. Instead, I had chosen to walk to the Salvation Army. Sure, their meals were cold too, but at least they weren't hard to find. Options were limited living on the streets.

The sun was beating down on me. I was amazed at how hot the day could be after the evening had been so cold. I was beginning to regret my choice of attire. Corduroys and a long-sleeve shirt would definitely make the nights easier to take, but they were beginning to ruin my days.

A few other homeless men were already waiting for the daily food rationing. At twenty-one years of age, I was by far the youngest. Several of these men seemed to have been alive forever, for they barely looked alive now. Years on the street had cut deep lines into their faces. The skin on their hands and arms was rough and cracked, as though they had experienced years of labor, yet more than likely the calluses were the result of years in the elements. I stood quietly at the end of the line, waiting for the meal distribution to begin.

The man right in front of me had paint all over his jacket and shoes. Curious, I asked him what had happened. He explained that he had been getting paid to paint walls at a church building down the way.

Before I could continue the conversation, a man named Rex lined up behind me. (I knew his name was Rex because he had written "REX" on his hand.) He offered me a cigarette and then began telling us how he had been kicked out of the VA hospital because of his injuries. I had never heard of someone who was kicked out of a hospital because of their injuries until Rex explained: an ant had crawled into his ear, and when he tried to kill the ant with a stick, he punctured his eardrum. Before Rex could share more of the nasty details, the Salvation Army lieutenants or generals—whatever you call those who serve the food there—opened the door by the dining area. It was time to eat.

Cold chicken tenders, cheese poofs (aka fake Cheetos), and a pint of milk hit the spot. The cardboard box filled with milk proved to be somewhat problematic at first. I couldn't get that sucker to open right. I pulled at the V section, but the seal never opened. I had to poke a hole through the seal with my dirty fingers to pull away the opening. I hate it when that happens!

Just before heading out for my next item to scavenge, I noticed that the fellow with paint splattered all over him seemed to be admiring my shoes. The rest of my outfit may have provoked laughter earlier in the day as I walked past a group of teenagers,

but these shoes were now provoking interest. I loved my shoes. They were snazzy. The gray meshy material covered with a darker gray design looked good. Best of all, they *felt* good. I needed those comfortable shoes for my adventures on the streets. Deep inside somewhere, I knew I should talk with him again. It was deep inside, near my heart—a place called my conscience, I think.

“How long have you been on the streets?” I asked.

“A few years. Ever since my mom died.” He looked like a stranger to the indoors. I guessed he may have been in his forties. Gray hairs intermingled with his black hairs. His hair was fluffy on one side and flat on the other. It was as though he had a comb for his Afro for only half the necessary grooming time, or as though he had been getting ready in front of a mirror that showed only half his face. I had noticed a few teeth missing and only nine and a half fingers. I discovered that his name was Leonard.

“Want to try on these shoes?” I had hesitated to offer at first, but the more I stood there watching him inhale his cheese poofs as though they were the greatest source of nourishment known to mankind, the more certain I had become.

“No. I was just noticing them and wondering where to get me some like that. I know how important good walking shoes are.” He began licking the cheese poof residue off the four and a half fingers of his left hand.

“Let’s just see if they fit. They’re too big for me.” I sat down to undo the Velcro on my snazzy gray shoes. He shrugged his shoulders and slipped off his beat-up brown shoes. They looked like penny loafers without the pennies.

As proud as I had been to wear those gray shoes, I was even more proud to see him wearing them. It was as though they were the greatest Christmas present he’d ever received. After fastening them, he jumped up and down, testing their quite excellent bounce. They had enough cushion to make you think you were walking with shock absorbers. I started walking away with a smile on my face.

“Hey! How long have you been on the streets?” I could tell he was trying to continue the conversation as a way of thanking me.

“Oh,” I said, turning around to see his not-so-toothy grin, “I became homeless yesterday afternoon, and I’ll be back in my dorm tomorrow night. I’m taking part in a poverty simulation weekend with my school.”

“Great! Have fun with that, and thanks for the shoes!”

Simulated Poverty

During my class called “Poverty in Waco,” we were required to attend a poverty simulation. Jimmy and Janet Dorrell lead Mission Waco, an organization committed to

serving some of the poorest areas in Waco, Texas. (Waco is not a large place, but even in a city of one hundred thousand people located halfway between Dallas and Austin, there are plenty of people who have genuine needs.) The Dorrells live in an underprivileged neighborhood, lead a church for the homeless who hang out under a freeway interstate, serve the city's impoverished, and expose Baylor students, among others, to life on the streets. The experience opened my eyes to an entirely new world. As a result, I took my youth group and Deborah, who was then my girlfriend, to the next poverty simulation. I wanted them to catch a glimpse of what it looked like to actively serve those in need.

After welcoming us, the Dorrells shared the ground rules. "This weekend we are not going to simply talk about serving the homeless. You are going to *experience* homelessness. Choose two items from your suitcases to keep, excluding clothes. Everything else will be locked away for the entire weekend."

Panic ensued. The participants started asking, "Should I keep a toothbrush, my Bible, my sleeping bag, a pillow, my teddy bear? What should I keep?" Some began negotiating with each other. "I'll keep my glasses and toothbrush if you'll keep your sleeping bag and toothpaste so we can share." Sharing a toothbrush? Hey, desperate times called for desperate measures!

Since I had already experienced the weekend, I knew what to choose. I kept my sleeping bag and my comb; I wanted to sleep good and look good. Deborah ended up choosing her purse and her sleeping bag. After being reprimanded for trying to keep her purse and reminded she could only have *two items*, she chose her toothbrush and sleeping bag. When a headache later began pounding in her temple, she began to despise "the game." When I bring up that weekend, she usually reminds me that she almost died without her Tylenol.

One of the kids in my youth group, Wesley, chose not to keep anything. As we discovered throughout the weekend, Wesley was excellent at living on the streets. He ended up making more money panhandling throughout the weekend than what he had to spend for the retreat. He was *too* good at being poor. After the simulation ended, we had to convince Wesley to go home to live in his house with his family rather than staying on the street for the rest of the week.

As I've gotten to know my wife over the years, I realize now why the poverty simulation was not a good experience for her. She is full of empathy and concern for others. She did not have to live as a homeless woman to see the world as those in poverty see it. She has a natural knack for loving people who are often overlooked. For me, on the other hand, the dirt under my fingernails, the growling stomach, the pointing, and the humiliation were necessary to help me see people I had never seen before. Walking in their raggedy brown dress shoes changed my life.

Seeing the Obvious

Growing up working as a carpenter and preparing for the revolution he was about to unleash, Jesus came across a unique moment in his life that would define his future and the path for all who would follow him throughout history. After fasting for forty days and overcoming a face-to-face encounter with Satan himself, Jesus was prepared for this unique moment. Jesus was about to preach his first sermon in Nazareth, where he had grown up.

The act of preaching is quite a scary prospect. I remember the questions that filled my mind before my first sermon. What if they laugh when I'm sharing something I intended to be serious? What if they cry when I really meant to be funny? What if no one responds at all? What if I forget what I'm supposed to say? What if I say something I didn't mean to say? Having heard many mistakes from pastors along the way, I was nervous. Thank goodness, my first message was shared before the Internet was created to pass along the many mistakes of those who were trying to preach about God but because of a slip of the tongue are now infamous. (I'm sure you've heard the audio of the guy who meant to say "pitched his tents"; if not, look online without any kids nearby.)

Speaking publicly in front of those who already know you is even scarier. Sure, they may seem to be more forgiving since, hopefully, they like you; but they also know you, and they will see you again after the preaching moment comes to an end. Any mistake made would be forever remembered and resurrected at the most inopportune moments. I preached my first sermon at the place where I was involved as a teenager, and it came during a youth-led service at Shady Oaks Baptist Church in Hurst, Texas. Originally, I was just supposed to share my testimony, but once our senior pastor, Dr. John W. Bobo, heard that I was interested in pursuing ministry in the future, what was originally going to be a two-minute story about how God had changed my life mutated to become a thirty-minute sermon. Seeing Sunday school teachers in the crowd who were familiar with my former extracurricular activities made me that much more self-conscious. I was so nervous I spoke extremely quickly. Without intending to do so, I finished in a record-breaking seven minutes. Sure, it was longer than the two-minute testimony would have been, but it was also quite underwhelming and embarrassing. I'm sure there were many who thought I should reconsider my pursuit of ministry in favor of any job that wouldn't require standing in front of others while talking.

Jesus's first sermon back home had worse results. He was almost killed by his neighbors and former Saturday school teachers. Had he allowed an inappropriate word to slip out of his mouth when he actually intended to say something else? Had he called his hearers out for secret sins that he made public? What on earth did Jesus say in his homecoming message?

Standing in front of those who knew Jesus and his family, Jesus proclaimed his

purpose for living and, as we know now, his reason for dying. Jesus read from a scroll:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

(Luke 4:18 – 19, quoting from Isaiah 61:1 – 2; Isaiah 58:6)

Rolling up the scroll, Jesus sat down. With everyone’s eyes focused on him, Jesus continued his brief yet earth-shattering message: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). The response from the crowd: “Isn’t that cute? That’s Joseph’s little boy all grown up” (my paraphrase of Luke 4:22).

Certainly by this time, many of Jesus’s neighbors and friends had heard about some of his adventures and good deeds in the surrounding areas. They loved the idea that a prophet was rising up from their neighborhood. They were excited to be able to tell their friends, “I knew Jesus way before anyone else had even heard of him.” They were also excited that they would soon be the recipients of God’s special blessing. The miraculous works of God were about to begin!

The people in the crowd seemed to like the idea that Jesus was going to help the poor, the imprisoned, the sick, and the oppressed. We tend to appreciate when other people do good things for those in need. In some ways it helps us feel better about not being involved, knowing that at least *someone* is doing the hard work.

Knowing that they hadn’t heard what he said but just liked the fact that he had said anything at all, Jesus continued to explain to them that this was no ordinary homecoming message:

Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’

“Truly I tell you,” he continued, “prophets are not accepted in their hometowns. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed —only Naaman the Syrian.”

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:24-30)

In the midst of the crowd's enthusiasm, Jesus shared news that turned the crowd against him: all of those good things he just read about from the scroll would not happen in Nazareth, for the town's residents did not see Jesus as they should. He was more than just a carpenter. He was more than just Joseph's son. He was a prophet and a messenger of God, and—even more remarkable and hard for them to believe—he was God's Son. Jesus could not care for the poor or oppressed in his hometown because they didn't see him as capable of doing so. To them, Jesus was just a normal guy. Jesus was offering hope for people who needed help, but this help would not be forced. It was by invitation only, and his former friends and neighbors were not inviting him.

When Jesus shifted the focus of his efforts of blessing to those who were outside Nazareth and even used an example of God's blessing dirty Gentiles (Naaman the Syrian), rage replaced excitement. The people loved the idea of a special blessing for themselves but not for others. How could God not bestow a special blessing on them alone? After all, they were the people of Israel!

Bitter feelings soon gave way to angry actions. The crowd rose up, pointing fingers and yelling at Jesus, pushing, shoving, and moving him and everyone else out of the synagogue and away from the town. As frustrations boiled over, Jesus found himself on the edge of a cliff, on the edge of losing his life. With courage and resolve, Jesus escaped danger. This was not his day to die. With the power of God at his fingertips, he could have readily and decisively showed this crowd who he was. He could have proven to these former neighbors that he had power they never could have imagined was possible. With a wave of his hand he could have disappeared or summoned angry angels to surround the crowd or even brought in a flaming chariot into which he could have jumped to carry out his dramatic getaway. Instead, Jesus did something more spectacular: he walked through the angry mob and continued his journey. Jesus would not be stopped.

As a Gentile, I become excited by the very thing that enraged the people of Nazareth. I am glad God decided to expand his blessing from just those in Israel to include all peoples on earth. In reality, these Israelites had forgotten that even their blessing as God's people was to lead toward the blessing of all nations (see Genesis 12:1 – 3). God's blessing was not to be held hostage or hoarded but shared with others.

Before we are too hard on this crowd, we should be honest with our own response to Jesus's words. When I was growing up, I remember hearing that we were “the new children of God.” We had replaced Israel as “the nation under God.” I am referring not to those who choose to follow Christ (i.e., the Church) but to the United States of

America. I remember being taught that the United States of America was now “the nation blessed by God” to be “a blessing to the nations.” For proof, all we had to do was look at the word “Jerusalem.” Can you see the proof? Right there in the middle of the City of Zion are three important letters. Do you see them? **Jerusalem**. The USA was the new Jerusalem. How would we feel if we were being told that God’s blessing was no longer upon us but was upon Korea, El Salvador, Kenya, or China?

If I am truly honest, had I heard Jesus’s first sermon when I was younger, I would have had a mixed reaction. The second part of Jesus’s message would have inspired me. I am not from Nazareth, and I am not Jewish. Jesus’s promise to bless the Gentiles means a blessing on me! To this, I say, “Bring it on!” However, the first part of the message would *not* have inspired me; it would have scared me or perhaps even angered me.

From the very beginning, Jesus set his sights on serving those on the margins of society—the poor, the disabled, the oppressed, the forgotten, the untouchables. That would not have interested me because I didn’t see any of these as describing me. From a purely selfish perspective, it appears that Jesus’s message and his ministry are not for me—a white guy who grew up in the suburbs and has never been blind or in jail. I may not have started a riot sitting in that room where Jesus spoke, but I certainly would have looked for someone else to follow. What kind of fool does Jesus think I am to ask me to pour out my life in service to people who are “less than me”? I want a leader who is committed to meeting *my* needs! I want to follow someone who is devoted to *me*! Who is Jesus to stand in front of me and invite me to lay down my life for others when I haven’t even found happiness or joy in *my* life?

Since I have embraced a relationship with Jesus, I have come to realize that I’m more of an outcast than I thought. I need God more than I ever would have wanted to admit. At the same time, I have come to discover that when Jesus promised we would find our lives only as we lose our lives in serving others, he was telling the truth (see Matthew 10:39; Mark 10:42 – 45; John 12:24 – 26).

Jesus chose carefully the text he would read that day in his hometown of Nazareth. He could have chosen thousands of different verses that would have pointed out his greatness and his arrival as Savior. Instead, Jesus chose to point out God’s heart for the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40). Since the world fails to care for those with the greatest need, Jesus would care, and he would call all who follow him to do the same.

Relearning Again

Have you ever forgotten what you have already known? I love the phrase I’ve heard people use to describe intelligent people: “She has forgotten more than I will ever know.” For me, I tend to have the same experiences over and over. It seems as though I really understand what God is teaching me, but then I forget again and need to relearn or at least be reminded.

I think as followers of Christ we go through these cycles. There is so much more for us to learn, yet we need to retrace our previous steps. Throughout history, Christians have been at the forefront of caring for the marginalized and overlooked. A remnant of the church has always been present among the poor. In more recent memory, the Salvation Army, Sojourners, and World Impact, as well as many others, have not only called the church to get involved in the lives of the underprivileged; they have mobilized millions of people as well. Sadly, at the same time, many churches have moved away from poverty-stricken neighborhoods and especially out of the cities. Most of evangelical America tends to be hunkered down in the suburbs, just beyond the reach of the inner city.

Somewhere along the way, Christians in the Western world began to veer in one of two directions: some saw the gospel as being about compassion and social justice, yet their theology moved to the left; a more conservative approach maintained a high view of the Scriptures yet saw the gospel as moving a person toward personal conversion. One group met the physical and social needs of the person, while perhaps skimping on the spiritual. The other group was all about the spiritual needs, yet it overlooked the obvious physical and social conditions.

I think both are right and both are wrong. We should seek to meet both the physical and the spiritual needs of a person, working to help the situation and the person change. During my college days, I knew this to be true while trying to reach people in a “transitional” neighborhood. I knew it to be true in Seattle while reaching out to a family with a mom who had twelve kids with four different dads. I knew it to be true in LA, serving among some of our families at Mosaic and now I know it to be true in Austin. Yet I tend to forget so very quickly. I start getting busy doing good things and forget the great things to which I am called.

In Waco, I truly enjoyed serving as a youth pastor. It was quite a challenge to be part of an older Caucasian group located in more of an African American and Latino neighborhood. The teens I began to befriend didn’t fit in at the church. In addition to the obvious ethnic differences, these kids were from a different socioeconomic class than those who came to our weekly church services. One of the challenges we faced as a church was the frequent number of requests for money that came from people in the neighborhood. The policy was to refer these folks who needed assistance to another organization. As a church, we donated hundreds of dollars to this organization so it could effectively serve the underprivileged.

Personally, I began to feel uncomfortable making these referrals when I knew I could help many of the people. After looking into the faces of dozens of moms and little babies and pointing toward the mission, I reached a point where I couldn’t stand to make one more referral. These people didn’t fit the stereotype of people living on the streets who seemed to only want money for drugs or alcohol. It was then that I came up with a crazy plan—actually, it was so crazy I felt it must have been from God.

I decided to financially help *anyone* who asked me. Now this was a truly ridiculous idea since I was getting paid \$70 a week as the youth minister. My parents were kind enough to pay for my education and my food and lodging, but I had to stretch this tiny paycheck to pay for my gasoline, my college road trips, and, more importantly, my occasional dates. There were so many people coming to the church offices looking for help, I figured there was no way I could maintain this commitment. Of course, this dawned on me only after I had promised God I would trust him in this way.

For the next several months, a remarkable thing began to happen. Just as I began to purchase groceries for a family or pay someone's gas bill, money seemed to come from out of nowhere. I had generous grandparents who always sent me some cash when each major holiday came along, but now it seemed to be more than before. I was being paid to speak at youth retreats. I discovered free ways to have fun on campus (watching movies, participating in midnight mud football, playing video games, covering the dorm bathroom floors with Vaseline, and so on). Over the course of the next year and a half, I spent about \$450 of my own money meeting people's real needs.

A funny thing happened as I prepared to leave this church to get married and move to Seattle. These very wonderful people from our church in Waco threw me and Deborah a going-away party. There may be a lot of things about the South that are quirky, but one of the best things about the South is something called a "love offering." At the end of the party, our friends presented us with the cash everyone had donated for us to enjoy in our new life together. In addition to the wedding gifts they had given us at a previous wedding shower, these generous people had given us a total of \$600! We were so excited and encouraged. We would need every penny we could find to move to Seattle, find jobs, and find a place to live. As we drove away, it dawned on me—God had paid me back for all the people I had helped over those several months. (Not only that, he included a very generous tip!)

It may not have been the best strategy for helping people overcome their ongoing struggle with poverty. A onetime gift doesn't erase all of the problems. I also got ripped off a few times. One woman came to the front of the church during the altar call, crying and wanting to connect with God. I prayed with her, gave her a ride home, and gave her all the cash in my wallet to help with her rent. As soon as she closed the door to her apartment, I could hear her laughing about how stupid I was to fall for her act. My strategy may have been shortsighted and naive, but I was a changed person. I discovered that God can meet the needs of others through me, and in the process he can take care of my needs as well. I realized that I could be a part of the solution to the problems I saw around me.

In spite of that experience, I know that I've had moments throughout the years when I have forgotten the poor and the oppressed. Too often my eyes are open, but I'm not seeing what should be obvious. Throughout the Scriptures, God reveals the place he

has in his heart for those who are disadvantaged. As God called his people, the Israelites, to be set apart, his desire for justice and compassion was a common theme. When Israel would veer off course, the judges or the prophets would point them back toward mercy. From the mercy God offered the murderer Cain in the cities of refuge to the heavenly city described in Revelation, God has always had a heart for the city, yet too often we run away from the places of greatest need.

For a long time, I had always thought of Jesus and even Christianity as being more devoted to rural areas. But Jesus spent a great deal of time in Galilee, which was one of the most densely populated regions in the entire Roman Empire (two hundred thousand people within a fifteen-mile-by-twenty-five-mile radius).¹ Jesus wept for the city (see Luke 19:41). The Way spread through Paul's urban church planting strategy in the cities of the Roman world.

In our world, half of the urban populations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America live in slums. Ten percent of the world's population are children who live in the urban slums on these three continents. Right now, there are one billion urban poor in the world.² In the United States, there are forty million unchurched urban poor.³ In Alhambra, California, the school district where my kids attended elementary school there are 25,000 students who are primarily Asian (52 percent), Latino (40 percent), and Anglo (5 percent). In this group, 67 percent of the students live below the poverty level.⁴

No matter where I have lived, I have not only failed at times to see the tremendous needs around us, but I have also failed to champion or even get involved with those who are already doing significant things for others. So many people in our community exert a great deal of effort that goes unnoticed. A large number of people work among those in desperate need—serving as teachers, counselors, nurses, attorneys, tutors, and doctors. Others have started businesses or responded to ongoing service opportunities while many people and small groups volunteer a great deal of time with local schools and non-profit organizations. I want to do all I can to encourage those who are already serving while influencing those around me to engage in meeting the physical, spiritual, emotional, and social needs of those who are regularly overlooked.

We would be amazed at the amount of progress we can make if we reach out to serve those we deem untouchable. Just as slavery and colonialism came to an end through the efforts of passionate people, we can be a part of showing compassion to people in financial distress. In *The End of Poverty*, Jeffrey D. Sachs makes this comment:

Our generation is heir to two and a half centuries of economic progress. We can realistically envision a world without extreme poverty by the year 2025 because technological progress enables us to meet basic human needs on a global scale and to achieve a margin above basic needs unprecedented in history. . . .

Let the future say of our generation that we sent forth mighty currents of hope, and that we worked together to heal the world.⁵

Overlooking Others

Some of us have overlooked those who are in the grip of poverty. For others of us, we may disregard children, senior citizens, innovators, unreached people groups, the abused, the abusers, the victims, the imprisoned, those with whom we disagree theologically, those who are physically challenged, those who are mentally challenged, and those who are overweight. Some of us may even struggle to embrace others who might be accepted more readily.

When we love those who are overlooked or deemed untouchable by society, we should listen to them so we can learn from them the best ways to serve them, avoiding the temptation to come rushing in as a “hero” or a “knight in shining armor.” At a nearby university, I was walking around during a health fair at which students were having their blood checked, receiving massages, getting healthy snacks, and so on. All around the plaza area were several booths representing different types of organizations or businesses committed to helping the students live healthier lives. One of the booths really stood out to me—the one with the hand-painted sign that read “Overeaters Anonymous.” I was perplexed. If someone walked over to that booth for help, he or she would no longer be anonymous; at the same time, of the many struggles we all face, this is one that can’t truly remain anonymous. The booth not only seemed to fail to attract anyone who might have wanted help, but it also seemed to call attention to all of those at the health fair who should have come over. This was one of those moments when “Do to others as you would have them do to you” was worth believing and applying.

Considering our life experiences, passions, personality, gifts, and God’s leading, we should look beyond those we normally see to discover others we can serve. Deborah discovered her love for working with autistic kids as an occupational therapist. I was always amazed by Deborah and her colleagues as they demonstrated patience and selflessness in serving kids who don’t or won’t thank them. They found such joy in minor progress whether it was a ten-year-old learning to tie her shoes or a six-year-old learning to use the toilet. In Austin, Deborah’s efforts have shifted to serving senior adults with whom she started a Bible study at our neighborhood nursing home.

A friend of mine told of his experience adopting a little boy whose mother was in prison. He shared how his wife and kids had opened their home and their lives to a little boy who otherwise would have grown up in the foster care system. This little boy had not chosen his parents, but now he had new parents who had chosen him. My friend said that they had been thinking of adopting for years, but they were afraid of looking into the foster care system since so many of these kids have been through horrific situations. They changed their minds and proceeded after he heard a message

in which Mark Driscoll said, “As Christians, we are to take responsibility for the irresponsibility of others.” Remarkably, my friend mentioned that the process took only eight months and a few hundred dollars to rescue this young boy and change his life forever.

As Jesus looked around at the men and women who followed him so that they could mooch a free meal, he described them as valuable and significant, as “salt and light” (see Matthew 5:13 – 14). Jesus saw the blind, those with leprosy, and the poor and met their needs. Jesus also saw those whose wallets were full but whose hearts were empty. Jesus loved them all. Jesus reached out and touched the untouchables.

8. Compassionate Conservatives and Loving Liberals: Reaching Across the Ideological Aisle

It was an unlikely song to sing by an unlikely artist. At Gateway Church in Austin, the bands at our campuses often play a cover song that relates to the message. Much like the way Paul quoted the local poets when communicating the message of Jesus in Athens as recorded in Acts 17, we cover songs by artists like U2, 21 Pilots, Katy Perry, Gary Clark, Jr., Lenny Kravitz, and so many, many more. On this particular Sunday, the message was about overcoming a broken marriage or finding healing for a relationship in crisis, so the band was playing “A Million Reasons” by Lady Gaga.

In South Austin, the bluest part of a blue city in a red state, playing this song on the Sunday after the 2016 election powerfully resonated with those in our local church who were devastated by the election results. So many of our people felt displaced, disconnected, and devalued through the rhetoric leading up to the election. So many could not believe their candidate had not won. For them, leaving for Canada was no longer a joke but a real option they now wanted to consider.

As a result, these lyrics described how they felt about their country on that cold and cloudy Sunday morning.

*You're giving me a million reasons to let you go
You're giving me a million reasons to quit the show
You're givin' me a million reasons
Give me a million reasons
Givin' me a million reasons
About a million reasons*

*If I had a highway, I would run for the hills
If you could find a dry way, I'd forever be still
But you're giving me a million reasons
Give me a million reasons
Givin' me a million reasons
About a million reasons*

*I bow down to pray
I try to make the worse seem better
Lord, show me the way*

*To cut through all his worn out leather
I've got a hundred million reasons to walk away
But baby, I just need one good one to stay*

So many have said that the United States of America has never been more divided than in the election of 2016. My brother Scott likes to point out, we were even more divided during the Civil War. Even still, I don't remember a time in my lifetime where division seemed so obvious and bitter. People have been more outspoken on social media about their political preferences and more willing to disassociate with others who voted differently than ever before.

Even before the 2016 election, partisanship has grown significantly in the United States. In 1949 it was quite common for a member of Congress to vote across party lines. Now that rarely happens at all.

The problem will unlikely get any better as social media platforms like Facebook create an echo chamber by filling users' feeds with more and more articles similar to what they have already liked or shared. As Facebook users defriend or mute others with varying opinions, it is less likely to even be introduced to an opinion different than our own.

When you add to the mix fake news, a lack of productive dialogue between people in disagreement, and the ineffectiveness of online arguing, we end up less and less connected with people who believe or vote differently than we do.

Serving as part of a church which is more and more ethnically diverse and definitely politically diverse made the 2016 election a challenging time. Our local church includes people who voted Libertarian, Republican, Democratic, Green Party, or wrote in Bernie Sanders. Some did not vote as a protest. Adding to the complexity, our church includes some campuses that are in more Republican counties and some campuses in more Democratic counties. Some of our campuses include attorneys, lobbyists, or even elected officials from one party or the other. As a result, all political sides end up frustrated that we are not willing to make political endorsements of policies or candidates or parties.

With our societies facing really important issues, should people of faith endorse a particular party and everything for which they stand or just completely disengage from politics all together?

Over the years, I have discovered another way to navigate this political battlefield.

I began to discover this alternative path years ago when serving as a youth pastor in East Los Angeles, CA.

One Size Does Not Fit All

One day Deborah and I were shopping at a mall in East of Los Angeles when I saw a hilarious shirt hanging in the window of a Chicano store. The T-shirt was brown with a yellow traffic sign on the front that pictured a family of Pilgrims running across the street just below the word “Caution.” The shirt was mocking the sign that actually exists near the border of Mexico along the freeway, which warns drivers to watch out for pedestrians by depicting the silhouettes of a man, a woman, and a pigtailed girl in the process of running. The designer of the shirt was reminding us that the original European immigrants came to Massachusetts without permission, just as is true for some Mexicans as they cross the border today.

The original traffic signs began appearing in the early 1990s after dozens of undocumented immigrants had been killed trying to cross the freeway on foot. Almost one hundred deaths took place within a five-year time frame. Those responsible for safety on our highways in California first introduced signs that read “Caution: Watch for people Crossing Road.” Unfortunately, drivers failed to pay attention to the wordy warning. As a result, an artist was chosen to design a sign that would protect both those who were crossing by foot over the freeway and those who were driving along the freeway.

The signs immediately created controversy. A story in the *San Diego Tribune* summed it up: “Some Latinos felt insulted by the faceless silhouettes, which they found reminiscent of animal-crossing signs. Anti-illegal immigration advocates were angry that a state agency would be trying to protect people who had broken the law. Some people feared the signs would be misread as indicating safe places to cross.”¹

Not knowing the history behind the sign and thinking that the teens in East LA would enjoy my hip new shirt, I bought it and wore it to the next youth group event. Before I even had a chance to bask in the responses of the students, one of the moms saw me and came up to me. She did not like my shirt one bit. She was stunned that I would wear a shirt that made light of the struggles of so many people who were trying to find a better life. I pointed out that the goal of the shirt was actually to communicate that almost every American here emigrated from somewhere else. In fact, this was the reason the family was wearing Pilgrim attire, including the father with the tall hat. Still flustered by my decision-making, she noted that from a distance the pilgrim’s hat looked like a sombrero.

In the United States of America, immigration has become a political land mine. One wrong move and you could have your friendships blown apart!

There are those who do not feel that undocumented immigrants living in the United States should receive special treatment – including some immigrants who moved to the United States legally.

There are others who feel that any who support enforcing the immigration laws already on the books or creating new laws including building a wall are racist.

The issue of immigration has been further complicated by the fact that Americans have a history of being a beautiful melting pot and a history of angry prejudice. The response to the issue of immigration changes depending on the person, the church, the part of the country, and even the time in history.

While living in Los Angeles, I discovered how truly complicated just this one issue can be.

Consider a brief history of Los Angeles:

- Present-day Los Angeles was originally inhabited by Native Americans.
- In the sixteenth century, Spain claimed most of the western parts of what is now the United States.
- In the late eighteenth century, Mexican settlers under the rule of the Spanish government formed a township and named the area *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles del Río de Porciúncula* (“The Town of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels on the River Porciúncula”). The name evolved and simplified to become “Los Angeles.”
- In 1821 Mexico gained its independence from Spain; thus, Los Angeles became a part of Mexico’s territory.
- In 1847, during the Mexican-American war, the United States took control of Los Angeles after the Battle of Rio San Gabriel.

Los Angeles’s population is currently about 50 percent Latino. Certainly some of the Latinos living in Los Angeles are new to the U.S.A. Some legally emigrated. Some did not. At the same time, there are some Latinos living in Los Angeles whose parents did not sneak over the border. For some, the border moved to include them.

From time to time, some people assert that everyone who lives in the United States should speak English, forgetting that some families have been living in Los Angeles and speaking Spanish for several generations. As one of my friends put it, “If Americans didn’t want people speaking Spanish, we shouldn’t have moved west.” At the same time, another friend of mine pointed out that Spanish is a European language forced on native peoples. She helped remind me just how complex these kinds of issues can be.

As some followers of Jesus express an increasing resistance to immigration, fearing harm at the hands of terrorists or even believing that their job security is at risk, many Latinos and others who have moved to the United States hear a message of exclusion.

An outspoken view on immigration policy from either side of the argument makes it difficult for the local church to reach immigrants. Ironically, some of those I thought

were immigrants actually had ancestors in the United States before my European ancestors moved here.

These issues remain complex and difficult to navigate. We are apt to offend someone whenever we take tough stands on all sorts of topics. If we approach political issues with sensitivity and examine them through the eyes of those most affected, perhaps we will avoid jumping on a bandwagon represented by a particular political party.

We should consider this issue beyond party lines and think in terms of what a godly response would be. Rather than coming to closure so quickly on an issue, we should listen to what others think and consider perspectives different than our own. Ultimately as followers of Jesus, we should allow our faith to inform our policies and determine when or how or even if we share those conclusions with others.

The fact of the matter is, the Scriptures can inform and even complicate our politics, leaving honest and good people on both sides of the political aisle.

Politicizing Jesus

When we make an exclusive commitment to a political party line, we end up limiting who we can reach and disciple. In the U.S., by embracing either party we distance ourselves from roughly 50 percent of the population.

The daily news seems to report clashes in our “uncivil war” on a daily basis. Conservatives hate liberals. Liberals hate conservatives. Popular shows on cable TV and on the radio are politically charged. Bitterness and acrimony persist between the two groups. Since these seem to be the two most viable options during an election year, we all get lumped into one of the categories, unable to shake free of the stereotypes. If we vote for the Republicans, Democrats insist that we are saying to the world that we are pro-life, pro-war, pro-capital punishment, pro-big business, anti-environment, and anti-poor. If we vote for the Democrats, Republicans insist that we are saying that we are pro-abortion, anti-war, pro-government, pro-welfare, and pro-immigration. Either way, we end up supporting some of our values but not all of them, as Jim Wallis explained in his book *God’s Politics*.³

Some Christians have defined the “battle” as political and have joined the cause of the Republicans. During the 1990s, the Christian Coalition (and in earlier days the Moral Majority) were so vocal about its stance on issues such as abortion and sexuality that its members have yelled themselves out of genuine conversations. Like protestors facing off across the street from each other, they yelled and screamed and chanted to make their point, but they were unable to hear their opponents, who were doing the same thing.

So it is with those who reside to the left of center on the political spectrum. Some Christians believe that they will find the answer to the nation's problems by joining with the Democrats, who claim to be more loving and more tolerant than their conservative counterparts, yet some of the people who support a more liberal government have moved toward a more liberal theology.

Adding to complexity of this issue, people may be liberal in some areas and conservative in others. For example, during the elections of 2008, the majority of African Americans in California voted for Barack Obama (the more liberal candidate), and they voted for a ban on gay marriage (a more conservative position).

Politics certainly play an important role in our society, but so often political discussions turn into angry debates. Too often we are so focused on what we want to change that we miss others in the process. What if people of faith considered new rules of engagement online when it comes to politics?

For starters, we could begin by asking: "What would Jesus post?" Seriously though, we should consider our goal before posting something political on our social media accounts.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are we trying to get more "shares" or "likes"?
- Are we trying to start a debate to get ourselves more attention?

If "yes" to either of these questions, then don't post it.

- If we are trying to change someone's mind, will this truly help them to do so?
- Are we reflecting Jesus well with the tone we use in what we are writing?

In these instances, if "yes" then consider posting it if the other factors below line up.

We need to realize that not everyone we know feels the same thing as we do about certain issues. Some issues do not need to be addressed, at least by us. In fact, we could point others toward genuine experts rather than feel the need to present ourselves as an expert.

If we truly feel strongly about something and even led by God to do something about it, we could use Facebook or Twitter to invite people over for dinner to discuss the merits of an issue and consider the next path forward.

Consider this idea: use social media to unite people and bring people together. Move hard conversations to face to face or over the phone. Rarely does an online debate make any progress. We should ask ourselves: does posting this help me advance the Kingdom of Jesus or not? When in doubt, don't post it.

I am inspired when I meet people who decided not to just get angry about an issue but chose to do something about it. For example, rather than debating with others about pro-life or pro-choice, I know people who have adopted a child, become foster parents, and mobilized others to care for babies whom some moms could not keep.

We should not be content with just being moved when we watch the news or hear of something that angers us and post about it. Instead, we should be *moved to action*.

Being Right All the Time

For years I struggled as a news junkie. Some may smoke a cigarette or drink a beer to relax at the end of a long day; I watched cable TV. When I had trouble slowing my mind down to sleep, I turned on the television. The blur and monotony of the images on the screen created the ideal sedative for me. Have you ever had one of those nights when you lie in bed thinking about how to make yourself stop thinking so you can finally go to sleep? On several sleepless summer nights in 2005, I found myself watching *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*, which at the time I thought were the best news shows (not dealing with sports) on the planet. The minds behind *The Daily Show* proclaimed themselves to be “the one news organization with no credibility to lose.” Many of my moments just before sleep back then were filled with interviews, stories, monologues, and montages from these comic geniuses.

Stewart and Colbert made me laugh, and I tended to laugh hardest when they made fun of us Christians. Being able to laugh at yourself is a freeing feeling. Seeing yourself through the eyes of others can bring great insight. When Jon Stewart interviewed politician Howard Dean, Dean really didn’t say anything new; he just said a lot of really good things all at once:

[Conservatives] talk about morals, but they don’t do anything to help the poor. Last time I saw, helping the poor was something that was mentioned three thousand times in the Bible. I have yet to find a reference to gay marriage in the Bible. These people are obsessed with things that are not about basic core American values, and I’m sick of it and so is [sic] a lot of other people, and I am happy to stand up for them.

After the crowd erupted with applause, Jon Stewart added, “By the way, I am not through the Bible yet, so don’t tell me how it ends.” Later Dean described the philosophy of the Democratic community as “‘Love thy neighbor as thyself,’ and you don’t get to choose your neighbors.”⁴

Howard Dean may not be the best public speaker around, but he summarized a lot of what we as Christians need to hear. Sadly, the world is often more aware of what and whom Christians hate rather than knowing and appreciating us for whom and how we love.

For years we have felt called as missionaries to cities considered more liberal by others—Seattle, Los Angeles, and now Austin. Years ago, during a visit to Dallas to see family and friends one summer, Deborah described to several people how much she enjoyed living in a rather liberal environment. She loved the organic stores like Trader Joe's, the great health care for kids with special needs, and friends from a variety of diverse backgrounds. She mentioned how much she liked the authenticity of the people we know, how they never try to hide how they live from those around them.

When she finished describing the benefits of living in a liberal land, those in the room were shocked. I am sure they wondered what had happened to the girl who grew up going to a private Christian school where secular music was not allowed (unless, of course, it was country music). After a moment of stunned silence, the first question someone asked was, "When do you believe life begins?" Another person said, "Now, you actually like living there so you can change the liberals, right?"

Later during that same conversation, a person in the room suggested that Elizabeth Edwards (the wife of 2004 Democratic vice-presidential John Edwards) deserved breast cancer since she was pro-abortion. This person's shocking opinion reveals what many Christians may think: too many of us think of tragedy in the life of someone who disagrees with us as a good thing. Too many of us applaud God's judgment as just giving people what they deserve.

At the time, no one could believe that Deborah actually enjoyed her life in La-La Land, the land of fruits and nuts. These folks could not seem to understand that Deborah has friends who are gay, pro-abortion, liberal, and even Democrats. They felt that we should not associate with those with whom we disagree.

Exiles

The New Testament has an odd description for people who follow Jesus.

Peter calls us exiles. He writes:

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2:11-17)

In the midst of a time of persecution and even when victimized by an evil empire, Peter encourages those who follow Christ to remember that we are citizens first of another Kingdom even as we should honor those in authority.

Even when the people of Israel saw their homeland destroyed by the Babylonians and many of their best and brightest were taken captive and brought to Babylon, exiled from their home, the people were encouraged to be productive members of society. Jeremiah writes:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughtersBut seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

Jeremiah is saying, “You can be satisfied and content even in exile!” Jeremiah continues:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:11-12)

Many of us love this passage! We love that God has future plans for us that are hopeful!

At the same time, most of us may not realize this passage was written to people who lived in exile. They had lost their homes. Some had lost family members or friends as a result of the policies and decisions of the Babylonians. Even still, they were called by God to make a positive difference in their home. They were to make the most of where they lived.

The Scriptures are reminding us that ultimately, as people of faith, our allegiance is first and foremost towards the Kingdom of God. We represent Jesus everywhere we go, including online, at work, at home, in a nation with a Christian heritage or in a place where persecution remains the norm.

In the Bible Project video on Revelation 12-22, Dr. Tim Mackie unpacks the message of the book of Revelation when he says:

John's trying to show the churches that neither Rome nor any other nation or human is the real enemy. There are dark spiritual powers at work, and Jesus's followers will announce Jesus's victory by remaining faithful and loving their enemies just like the slain Lamb....

John sees two beasts empowered by the dragon. One of them represents national military power that conquers through violence; the other beast symbolizes the economic propaganda machine that exalts this power as divine. These beasts demand full allegiance from the nations.... The nations become beasts when they exalt their own power and economic security as a false god and then demand total allegiance. Babylon was the Beast in Daniel's day, but that was followed by Persia followed by Greece and now Rome in John's day and so it goes for any later nation that acts in the same way.

Nations rise and fall, but the Kingdom of God lasts forever.

Removing the Litmus Test

An Iranian woman was looking for God. Through a friend, she stumbled into a church filled with people who followed Jesus. Given her Muslim background, she wondered how she would be received. However, the warm and loving reception dispelled her fears and concerns. Not only was she drawn toward the people in this remarkably loving community; she began to become intrigued by Jesus. A personal relationship with Jesus seemed to help the men and women she had met overcome challenges and serve others in sacrificial ways. They seemed so different because they knew Jesus.

After a while, things changed dramatically. A few of her new friends within the community discovered that this intelligent and inquisitive woman was a doctor who was performing abortions. The warmth dissipated and coolness moved in. As her new friends began to debate with her about her profession, she soon felt unwelcomed and eventually left the church.

My friend who told me this story didn't know what had happened to her. So many times, a relationship with God changes how we live and who and what we value. However, I fear that she walked away from Jesus, thinking that if she wanted to know him personally, she had to make certain changes *first*.

Too often we make a person's stance on political issues a litmus test for whether a relationship can develop. As a result, if people don't believe as we do, we push them further and further away, diminishing our ability to influence both other Christians who have different values and those who do not claim to follow Christ.

This is a common theme among even the more outspoken evangelicals. In October 2005, the National Association of Evangelicals supported a stance declaring that global warming is caused by humans and needs to be addressed. Some of these well-known and well-respected pastors, including Rick Warren, author of the runaway bestseller *The Purpose Driven Life*, were ridiculed and maligned by more conservative Christians for agreeing with "far-left environmentalists."

Ironically, during the summer heat wave of 2006, Pat Robertson, one of the outspoken critics, changed his mind. An article posted on Reuters.com titled “Heat Makes Pat Robertson a Global Warming ‘Convert’” reports:

Conservative Christian broadcaster Pat Robertson said on Thursday the wave of scorching temperatures across the United States has converted him into a believer in global warming.

“We really need to address the burning of fossil fuels,” Robertson said on his “700 Club” broadcast. “It is getting hotter, and the icecaps are melting and there is a buildup of carbon dioxide in the air.”

After the heat index reached 115 degrees in Robertson’s part of the world, he mentioned on his television program that the heat wave was “the most convincing evidence I’ve seen on global warming in a long time.”

The article continues, “Last year, Robertson said natural disasters affecting the globe, including hurricanes Katrina and Rita that wrecked the U.S. Gulf Coast, might be signs that the biblical apocalypse was nearing.”

Perhaps some are right that we should all switch to hybrid cars and use less electricity to save the ozone layer and help avoid global warming, or others may be right as they suggest that maybe fears about global warming are much like our fears about the Y2K bug. Regardless, we should all consider examining each issue in a way that is independent of any particular political party, and then willingly dialogue with those who often disagree with us. Robertson’s initial response of criticizing other Christian leaders for particular points on which they agree with liberals implies that we should avoid all contact with others unless they agree with us in every way. If we took this approach, the pool of people with whom we could network or partner would dwindle to a small puddle.

When we share the same outcome goals with those who differ from us, partnership remains a powerful option. As long as we do not compromise our own values and beliefs in the process, we should look for opportunities to dialogue and even team up with others across the political spectrum. Jesus was deemed guilty by association as the religious leaders referred to him as “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of... sinners” (Matthew 11:19); therefore, we should be willing to work with others with whom we disagree in order to accomplish something noble and to develop meaningful relationships as well.

Years ago, one of our volunteer staff members at Mosaic suggested we get involved in “Big Sunday,” a one-day “clean up the city” initiative founded and led by Temple Israel of Hollywood. One of the leaders of the event mentioned that they were surprised we were willing to help since so few evangelical churches had ever shown interest. Over the past few years, Big Sunday has grown to include more than thirty

thousand people volunteering at more than two hundred nonprofit sites during this “Annual Day of Service.” How could we miss this kind of an opportunity to make an impact in our communities? How tragic would it be if the largest service day in the city did not include people who follow Jesus?

When we step into partnerships with those with whom we disagree in order to fight poverty, clean up our cities, fight injustice, and tackle issues we cannot solve on our own, we discover that we have an unlimited number of potential partners to help us make positive and lasting changes in our world.

History teaches us that it is possible to change the world from the ground up. We can learn this lesson from Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. who applied the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus’s call “to turn the other cheek” as part of their efforts to change society through civil disobedience.

We can also see this sort of grassroots transformation displayed in the biblical story of Nineveh. The eighth-century BC prophet Jonah arrived in Nineveh and delivered his message:

Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh . . . (Jonah 3:3-7)

After all of the Ninevites had turned to the Lord, the king felt the need to make a proclamation. (It was almost as though he wanted it to seem like it was *his* idea!) This radical transformation began with the people and moved upward. The king was the last to know. We need men and women who follow God and hold to strong moral values, finding their places of influence in the political world, but systemic and long-lasting transformation comes from the grassroots and moves upward.

Often, whether we realize it or not, we assume that real issues can only be solved politically. As we study the history books, we hear of the Emancipation Proclamation, the Civil War, and the Thirteenth Amendment, and we assume that Abraham Lincoln and other politicians ended slavery. Ironically, however, the goal of the Civil War was the bringing back of secessionist states while allowing slavery to continue in these states. As the war took its staggering toll, public sentiment in the North and in the border states shifted. Slavery’s end was no longer just a concern for abolitionists. The public accepted the idea before the legislation ever went into effect.

Lincoln understood the dynamics of what was happening and proclaimed, “With public sentiment nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed.... Consequently, he who holds public sentiment goes deeper than he who erects statutes or pronounces decisions.”⁵

During the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King, Jr. once said: "The Civil Rights Act was expected by many to suffer the fate of the Supreme Court decisions on school desegregation... massive defiance. But this pessimism overlooked a factor of supreme importance... this legislation was first written in the streets.”⁶

The Civil Rights Act leveled the playing field for many, but laws do not change the hearts of people. However, changed people can lead to a change in laws.

For example, those who have worked so hard politically and legislatively to bring about an end to abortions, if public sentiment remains divided even as the laws change, abortions would continue illegally until a shift in political power legalized them once again. To reduce abortions, people need to change their view of when life begins and see the consequences of their actions. This change would become noticeable with or without a law in the books.

We need to vote, and we need Christian men and women who work within both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. The political arena represents a tremendous mission field filled with people who have great influence or at least a tremendous potential to influence others.

More than anything, our politics should always be secondary to our practice as followers of Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote beautiful and memorable words about God’s great work of reconciliation:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands) — remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came

and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.
(Ephesians 2:11-20)*

Not only did those of us who follow Christ find ourselves on the wrong side of the border, but Christ helped us cross over and reconciled us with those on the other side. Our allegiance belongs first and foremost to God's kingdom. Our heavenly citizenship should always guide how we live our lives and how we treat others as citizens of our country and of our world.

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Series Schedule Options for *Not Like Me*:

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- A Love Greater Than Ethnicity
- A Love Greater Than Religion
- A Love Greater Than Social Class
- A Love Greater Than Morality
- A Love Greater Than Conflict

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Small Group Questions

Chapter 6: White Men Can Jump (Just Not as High)

1. Have you ever made a decision based on a stereotype? Share some examples.
2. How have you been the victim of stereotyping?
3. What new things can you do to show the world you represent God's love for all people?
4. How can you move beyond racial reconciliation and live a life reconciled to others? What sacrifices would your church or business need to make in order to move toward ethnic diversity?
5. Do you have neighbors, coworkers, or family members from different ethnic backgrounds? How can you reach out to love them, serve them, and learn from them?

Chapter 7: The Untouchables

1. What are the socioeconomic demographics of your city?
2. What are the local churches, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies doing to help those in need?
3. What are some practical ways you, your family, your small group, or your church can serve those in need?
4. Who are others your community often overlooks?
5. How can you serve those who are considered "untouchables" in your area?

Chapter 8: Compassionate Conservatives and Loving Liberals

1. Do you have friends with whom you disagree politically? Are these friends followers of Christ? Are they non-Christians?
2. How close are you willing to get to these friends? How close is too close, or is that even possible?
3. How can you more actively serve and love others with whom you disagree without compromising your convictions?
4. When is it appropriate to partner with others who do not agree with us?

Notes

Chapter 6: White Men Can Jump (Just Not as High)

1. “Mujahideen” refers, literally, to “those who wage jihad.” According to Merriam-Webster, the mujahideen are “Islamic guerilla fighters esp. in the Middle East.”

Chapter 7: The Untouchables

1. See Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), 120.
2. Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, 22, 64.
3. Cited by Keith Phillips, president of World Impact (www.worldimpact.org).
4. Mary Glenn, Alhambra city catalyst, “Kingdom Causes” (www.kingdomcauses.org).
5. Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 347, 368.

Chapter 8: Compassionate Conservatives and Loving Liberals

1. Leslie Berestein, “Highway Safety Sign Becomes Running Story on Immigration,” *San Diego Tribune*, April 10, 2005. Can be viewed online at *SignOnSanDiego.com*: www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20050410/news_1n10signs.html (October 17, 2006).
2. Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 33.
3. Jim Wallis, *God’s Politics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005).
4. “Interview with Howard Dean,” *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, June 23, 2005.
5. Cited in Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 206.
6. Cited in *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by Clayborne Carson (New York: Warner Books, 1998).