

plan [be]

Random thoughts on growing in a relationship with God
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Dedicated to the students of
EAST BAY FELLOWSHIP.

My prayer is that you will be people
who are in love with God.
May His love affect everything
about your lives.

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Wanna get the most out of this book?

Break it up. Would you consider reading a chapter per day for the next seven days? You could even just read one chapter a week.

Questions: There are questions at the end of each chapter. The purpose of this is to help bring real-life application to the thoughts offered in each chapter. Would you prayerfully and honestly contemplate these questions? You could even discuss them with a close friend?

[be]

Being part of the culture here in California in the year 2009, I'm constantly amazed by how much effort, time and money is spent on being better. From education, to exercise and everything else that we invest in ourselves, there are millions and millions of dollars and hours dedicated to being better.

Education and exercise are wonderful things, but what really matters more? Do we invest the same amount of effort into our relationship with God? If not then we must ask ourselves the question, "Do I really believe this stuff?"

Have you ever asked yourself that question?

I'd really recommend that you wrestle with this important question before you read the rest of this book. If you need to go for a hike, drive or a long walk and think about it. Please do.

We are talking about a relationship with the Living God here.

... a relationship with the Creator of all that exists!

It's kind of a big deal.

In fact, if you think about it, it's probably the most important thing on the agenda. Comparatively speaking, nothing matters more.

The Great Apostle Paul said it a bit more intensely.

"Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ."

Philippians 3:8 (The Message Translation)

Most of us believe that our faith has many implications that are eternal, yet we go through our lives with little to no growth as Christians. Most people don't continue growing after a few years of becoming a Christian. Meanwhile we spend everything we have for our life here, on stuff that means nothing in the light of eternity.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, written in the 1640s, states "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."ⁱ

In other words, if we miss this, then we've missed everything we were created for.

How can we know if we're missing it?

You've got to ask yourself this. How much of what I'm giving of my time, money and energy and even my life really matters? Am I enjoying God and glorifying God in those things? If not, what am I giving my life for?

It's not like you have to give up everything you love either. That's not what I'm saying. I'm not talking about going extreme and being one of those people that believe that everything spiritual is good and everything in the world is bad. I'm certainly not saying that you should go to church more and definitely not every night of the week. That doesn't work and I truly don't believe that God wants us to completely busy ourselves in more fruitless church activities. Nor does He want us to be so busy that we don't have time to hang out with our neighbors or friends who would probably never come to our church if we invited them.

God wants to be in the middle of all that we do. His desire is to be present with you in such an amazing way that His love flows through your life to give meaning to all your relationships, sports, work, and play. He wants to give you guidance on all the important decisions of life. He will be there to give you hope, support and strength when things don't go your way.

Don't you desire that?

You are obviously reading this little book for some reason. Either you've mastered all the spiritual disciplines, read all the books and this one's next on the list or you're like me. You've tried to walk with God and you just can't seem to get it right. You struggle daily against sin and sometimes God feels distant. You've tried harder and it still feels like your getting nowhere. Sometimes it's hard to talk about this stuff to people at church, because it seems that most people there have it all together and don't even struggle.

Do you ever feel like you're just going through the motions?

Do you think the answer is that we should just fake it until we make it?

I don't think so.

I'd like to offer you some of what I've learned. Hopefully, some of the things that have helped me will be an encouragement to you.

When you ask the question: "How do I grow in my relationship with God?" most of the time people will tell you to do a few things or to stop doing other things. And if you are already doing those few things and aren't doing the bad things most of the time, they might tell you "try harder." And there are always those people that are really good at this stuff and they just make you feel bad because they're so good at it. Doing those good things isn't bad. Obviously. However Jesus is very clear that just doing those things won't help us know Him or change to be more like Him.

Think about how crazy it is for a person's entire relationship with God to consist of getting better at the do's and don'ts. Isn't this what Jesus sets us free from? That plan doesn't make a great focus for a relationship. Imagine having a friendship where all you ever talk about is the things that

you did wrong and how you're going to try to do better. Isn't there more to a relationship with God? Doesn't He offer more?

I relate so much of relationships to my family: my wife Jenny and my daughter Ruby. I just enjoy being with them and I love them for who they are. My two-year-old daughter isn't able to do much on her own yet. She hasn't even quite figured out how to use the toilet yet. And yikes, sometimes that sure gets messy. Relationships are the same way. They are messy and they grow by being together over time and by going through stuff together. God is way more interested in your heart than your performance or perfection. Often times those things can actually keep us from coming to Him to receive His love and experiencing real change.

Weren't the Pharisees, who Jesus had the harshest conversations with, people that were the pros at all these do's and don'ts?

So that can't be the answer.

Can a person become a Christian in his or her own strength? The idea of being “born again” is something that can only happen to you. It's not because of anything that you do or don't do. Doesn't it make more sense that following Christ into the future is the same? We come to Him in complete surrender and dependence.

All you and I can do is be in a place that God can work to transform us and work through our lives. That's what this little book is about; it's about God's plan for you and I to “be” people that can receive the Kingdom of God and “be” continually transformed to be like Jesus until heaven.

So if you're like me, and plan A didn't work for you, let's try for plan [be]!

If you're ready... keep reading.

[be] empty

I was talking recently with my friend Josh about a Kung Fu movie that we had both seen. There's this scene where the young American wanna-be Kung Fu kid has asked the experienced Kung Fu monk to train him in the art of Kung Fu. The monk asks him if he'd like a drink and while pouring into his cup, he just keeps pouring until the cup overflows. When the young man tells him that it's full, the monk says, "Exactly. How can I fill your cup if it is already full?" Hopefully you get the idea. What he's saying is that in order for you to learn, you must not be full.

To grow spiritually you must not be full. You must never become full.

If you become full, you can't receive from God.

This is a not a good place to be.

"He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty."

Luke 1:53

Isn't this a theme through the life and teaching of Christ?

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

Matthew 5:3, 6

Jesus' words are so profound, because his audience was familiar with the big list of spiritual do's and don'ts. This is a call to realize that we are spiritually bankrupt. We can't do it. We are empty and in need of Christ. These are the kind of people that he's looking for. Poor, hungry, and empty people are the only kind of people that can receive the Kingdom of God.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who you knew wasn't listening? You know the kind of person who, while you are talking they are just thinking about the next thing that they

want to say? You might even have an email thread going, but they still aren't really reading half of what you are saying and you can tell. Don't you hate that?

Don't you think God feels the same way?

It's extremely rare and refreshing to find someone that actually listens. When you find a person like that, don't you just want to spend time with them? Don't you feel like they care when they take the time to listen and open their life to you?

I'd much rather learn listening skills than apologetics.

Apologetics are answers to the questions or debates about faith. Don't get me wrong; you need to know the Truth. It's important to have an accurate understanding of what and why you believe. If the purpose to your quest to learn is to prove that you are right then you can become

full. And when you become full, you cease to be loving.

I recently had a conversation with a guy who didn't believe in God who wanted to convince me that I was wrong in my beliefs. When I realized where the conversation was going, I prayed silently. I prayed that God would help me to listen and love. When I did listen, I knew that he felt loved. He thanked me and told me that he thought I was acting like Christ. Wow. People usually don't say that when I open my mouth. I could have argued with him, but would have gone nowhere. In fact, he told me that most Christians he's talked to just argue and get angry. Because I was loving and open to him as a person, he actually wanted to listen to me. There was no possible way that I could have helped him by convincing him that he was wrong. There's a great possibility that I did convince him that he's valuable and loved by God.

Why do people get full? Many people are open to grow to a certain point and just stop. Many are too busy. Many have an insatiable need to be right and know all the answers, but don't apply what they know to their own lives. Many people are just full of themselves and there's no room for others. Whatever it might be, when we are full, it tells others that we don't have room for them in our lives.

It also tells God that we have no room in our life for Him.

Emptying ourselves starts with recognizing that we don't know all the answers. The truth is, we will never know everything. We can never be done learning.

God's Word is absolute truth, but our understanding is not, and will never be, absolute.

Jesus relates it to children.

“When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’”

Mark 10:14-15

Sometimes being full just comes from sitting and receiving way too much knowledge without having a place to live it through serving and giving of your life. It's through love that we empty ourselves. God's love fills. This relationship with God is a constant flow. We empty, He fills. If you don't empty, it stops.

So if you find yourself full, empty yourself.

It's in emptiness that we experience the fullness of God.

It's here, in recognition of our absolute poverty, hunger, brokenness, need, and emptiness, that

we find grace, forgiveness, and fullness from God.

[be]

Questions:

Does my view of spiritual growth leave room for me to be open and in process?

Would others say that I'm a good listener?

When was the last time I heard God speak to me?

Am I hungry for God?

If you are hungry, this is good time to ask God to fill you. If you aren't, just ask God to give you the desire for more of Him.

[be] helpless

I like Burritos.

Sometimes too much... I have days where I eat too many burritos. Actually, I've had many days where I've eaten a burrito for breakfast, lunch and dinner. No joke.

What can I say? I just like burritos.

Changing my eating habits is almost impossible. I think I'd have to have a doctor sit me down and tell me that I'm going to die if I eat another burrito. Even then I might have to think about it for a while.

The truth is, it wouldn't be easy, but it is something I could change.

Is there anything I can do to get better spiritually in my own strength?

Can I even be Christian in my own strength?

Isaiah said it well in his prayer for mercy.

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”

Isaiah 64: 6

Even what we try to do to be righteous in our own strength is like filthy rags.

The word here for “filthy rags” is too graphic to actually describe here, but you get the point.

I am helpless when it comes to getting better spiritually. Any religious thing that I do that's not in God's strength is beyond worthless. At least that's the way God sees it. This is why trying harder, just doesn't work.

So, what does work?

Growing in relationship with God starts with Him. He's saved us by grace through His Son. He's taken the first step and all we have to do is respond and come to Him. Moving forward in relationship is more of the same. It's all God.

Something significant happened in the lives of Jesus' first twelve disciples. Well eleven, but you know what I mean. They went from being guys that completely abandoned Jesus on the Cross, to being the guys that would turn the world upside down. Something must have happened. Something changed their "being". Or better yet, someone.

"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

-Jesus (John 16:7)

Okay, I don't know about you, but I think if we had the choice to have Jesus here or the Holy

Spirit, ten out of ten would choose to have Jesus.
Right?

Wouldn't you?

But, Jesus knew something that we didn't. Maybe He knew that He, being human, could only be in one place at a time. He wants to be present with us in a new way. His promise is that His Spirit lives with us and in us.

Amazing!

Jesus goes on to tell us that the Holy Spirit not only is the One that will show us where we need change but will guide us into truth and come alongside us constantly. He is present with us.

He is present with you.

You are not alone.

Do you really believe that?

Do you live like you are not alone?

If you're like me, you're still trying to figure this thing out. And if you're like me, you don't always live like you are not alone. Being spiritual isn't something we can do on our own. Being spiritual starts and ends with the Spirit of God, not within ourselves.

We are helpless, but we have help. We have the Spirit of God as our Helper!

So does that mean that we don't have to try?

Not if you are trying in your own spiritual strength. If that's the case, you need to try less.

Let God work. He shows you something. You respond. He changes who you are through responsive obedience.

Instead of stopping sin because you get caught, you sort of stop because, well you just don't want to anymore.

That's not who you are.

Anymore.

Let's go back to that responsive obedience thing again for a minute. We are helpless, but there is definitely a connection between God's work and our obedience. He moves toward us. We take a step that He put in our hearts and gave us the strength to take. He moves closer and we are changed by His presence in our lives.

Check out what our friend the Apostle Paul says.

"What I'm getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you've done from the beginning. When I was living among you, you lived in responsive obedience. Now that I'm separated from you, keep it up. Better yet,

redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God. That energy is God's energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure."

Philippians 2:12-13 (The Message Translation)

Note the "willing" and "working". Just to have the desire to change comes from God, let alone the power to do anything about it.

There's a divine partnership where we respond to God and He takes us the rest of the way. It's all Him. Our response opens the door for the Spirit to do the real work.

The first step is to realize that you and I are helpless without God.

That's the place where we can find His help.

[be]

Questions:

In my relationship with God, who do I relate to more: The person who's trying really hard, but getting nowhere or the person that isn't really trying, because it feels pointless?

What do I need to surrender to God?

What would look different if I lived like I'm not alone?

Where can I see God's Spirit at work in my life?

How does He want me to respond?

Let's pray for more of Him in our lives.

[be] immersed in truth

If there's a word for a person that is the opposite of a vegetarian, it's me. I do apologize to those of you who are, because I know that you'll think this is really disgusting, but I literally can't go a day without eating meat. For me a meal is not a meal if it doesn't contain meat.

That's why I like burritos so much. With meat.

So, my wife Jenny, who's a wonderful cook, likes to find new recipes on the Internet to try out on me. Which usually works out well because I love to eat pretty much anything, as long as there's meat involved.

Except, Jenny doesn't share this same core value as me.

If you've ever had a shepherd's pie, you'd know that it's fantastic because it has potatoes, veggies, gravy and meat all together in that particular order from top to bottom. I had it for the first time at a church potluck in London and

it's been one of my favorite dishes to eat on a cold day ever since. It's good because it has meat in it, on the very bottom, because that's why you eat it.

So the recipe Jenny found was for a shepherd's pie, a meatless shepherd's pie.

We sat down for dinner and wow. It looked good. I was so excited to eat, until I got down to the bottom and there was no meat.

“Are you kidding me? Where's the meat?”

As you can imagine, that didn't go over too well with Jenny. By the time you read this book hopefully she will have forgiven me.

This is how our relationship with God is without Truth. God's Word has given us Truth and has promised to guide us into His Truth by His Spirit. This is essential.

Some people refer to “the meat” as when they go to church and the preacher gives a really deep message. And they change churches often, because they aren't getting “the meat.” Maybe you've never heard of this. I hope not. It's troublesome to me, because God's heart is for us to experience the meat on a daily basis by being fed and being transformed by His Word.

Paul talks about going from milk to solid food in his first letter to the church in Corinth (3:2), but he's not talking about something you get at church like a spiritual drive through window. I think what he's saying actually applies better to applying the truth that you already know, which is a big part of where I'm going with this.

So, you might be thinking, “Wait, I thought you said it wasn't about doing more and trying harder?” You might even be thinking that I'm just going to tell you to read the Bible more. Don't worry, it's not about that. The Bible doesn't actually say anywhere that we have to read it

every day. So take a deep breath and let go of any guilt that you may feel from not reading enough.

It's more than just hearing a message and it's more than just reading in the Word. It's about letting the Word get into you and stir things up.

Actually, just reading the Bible can sometimes do little good.

Jesus had some interesting conversations with religious leaders about this. Check this out.

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

John 5:39-40

If I'm not in a place of being empty and helplessly in need of God, I can end up reading

without getting much out of it and can actually do damage.

Again, let's get back to relationship... with the Living God, that is.

Think about sitting face to face with the living God, hearing His heart and asking Him for wisdom. How profound would that be?

Well, that's what God tells us we can do through the Word with His Spirit as our guide. If people truly experienced this kind of relationship with God they wouldn't go to church like consumers in the mall and walk away feeling like they didn't "get fed". They'd find out how to get fed from the only one who can truly satisfy. They'd be so full of God's love and Truth that they'd have to empty themselves by loving and serving others so that they can receive more. How cool is that?

God's heart is to be our source of life and love that overflows into the rest of our lives and into

the lives of others around us. So being immersed in Truth is about being immersed in God, because He embodies Truth.

It's about letting God's Word get into our minds, hearts and the deepest places of our souls. It's not just about getting into God's Word as it is letting God's Word get into you and make changes.

Again, this is where being empty comes into play. If we approach God's Word from "being full," we'll end up just reading as it applies to "those" people. We'll end up more judgmental and mean than we were before we read it. This scares me to death, because, if I'm that guy, I'm only bringing more judgment on myself.

The most important thing is that we approach Scripture from a place of humility, honesty, and hunger, so that we can allow it to affect the way we live. When we love others and obey God's commands we are living the Truth that we know.

Jesus tells us clearly that the more we act on His words, the more He will show us.

“He replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.’”

Luke 19:26

God will reveal truth to us, but you and I must respond. When we do He'll give us more.

So empty yourself. Get, if only a few, words from God and apply them. Let them affect everything about your life through the power of the Spirit of God. Let that Truth transform who you are.

Whether you can read chapters or just sentences, alone or in groups, on the Internet or on your MP3 player... it doesn't matter how.

Come humbly, honestly, and with hunger for more of God.

God's Word tells the truth about who you are. You will always be surrounded by messages that conflict with this true identity. If you desire authentic change, be immersed in God's Truth. Let it get into you and transform who you are.

Your life will never be the same.

[be]

Questions:

Have I ever felt like I'm not getting fed?

When was the last time I let God's Truth so deep into my life in such a way that it changed me from the inside out?

When I hear a sermon or read the Bible do I take what I learn to honest self-reflection? Or is it easy to think about "those" people?

What's God saying to me through the Truth I've just read? How will it affect who I am?

Pray.

[be] in relationship

Have you ever met that person who just knows all the answers, but the knowledge that they have doesn't translate into relationships? In fact, I've met a lot of Christians that live out all the do's and don'ts, they can quote Scripture and tell you all the Bible stories, but they're just awkward relationally. This is even at church where people have to like you. What really bugs me is how I can have so much knowledge, but then miss the opportunity to be loving.

I'm sorry, I know that it's not easy to have healthy relationships and to be loving, but isn't that the main point here? Shouldn't there be a glimmer of light? This is the one way that Jesus said that we'll be known for being His disciples: by the way we love others.

Jesus boiled all of the do's and don'ts down to one thing.

Love.

The Apostle Paul tells us that if we don't have love, we are nothing.

Again, I'll repeat that. No love? "You are nothing!"

If you want to be something, start with love.

We've lost much of the value of relationship in our culture. If we are honest, we don't really like to talk to people. And we don't do relationships that well. Even in the church. We could blame it on technology and the changing world, but what it comes down to is, we don't really know how to relate and get along with people sometimes. We especially don't do conflict well. Even in the church. How many Christians can you think of that have left a church because they couldn't resolve a conflict? For me, it's way more that I can count on both hands and feet.

I think conflict is one of the greatest indicators of a person's spiritual maturity.

The only way that we will grow spiritually is to grow relationally. My pastor Ron Pinkston once said “to be truly spiritual is to be truly relational.”

Isn't it all about relationships? Isn't that why God created us? Isn't that part of how we are created in the image of God? He is by nature a relational God.

Well, it's also where the rubber meets the road in our faith. And it will make or break our growth as believers. Relationships truly are a catalyst for our spiritual growth.

We need God and we need people. It's a fact.

God's desire is for us to have healthy relationships that point us closer to Him. He also desires for us to have relationships with people that are far from Him, so that we can show them His love.

Have you ever thought about this? Pretty much all of scripture was written to be read in a

community. They didn't have printing presses or Amazon.com. Scripture would have been read together. The only way that you can properly interpret scripture is in the context of why, how and to whom it was originally written. I might be so bold to say that you can't interpret the Truth correctly if you are not in the context of relationship.

That's how they did it back then. It would be crazy to think that everyone had their own Bible. And there's something to this. Sometimes when we read the Bible on our own, it's easier to think that it's for "those" other people or to apply it in a way that's disconnected from relationships. A really powerful thing happens when we hang out with others who are hungry to grow and wrestle with God's Truth together.

Jesus said, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Matt. 18:20

“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

Prov. 27:17

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

James 5:16

This is simple stuff, but it's really profound to our lives.

Just this week, I went for a hike with my sister Amy. We have a great relationship, and I'm thankful that she had the courage to talk to me about an inconsistency in my life. She noticed something about me that I hadn't noticed about myself. It's something that I've been unintentionally doing that isn't very loving. Now that I can see what it is and why I do it, God can work in that area of my life to bring real change. The last thing I want to do is allow any inconsistencies in my life to hurt the people around me. Since to me, relationships are the

most important thing in life. That's how it works. It's a commitment to transparent, honest and loving relationships that will bring about change and growth in our lives.

It's kind of like how...

....your true friends will tell you that you have broccoli in your teeth.

But we're taking that to a whole new level.

Spiritual growth is all about relationship, because so is the Cross.

Think about this. God created us to be in relationship with Him and with one another. Sin severed that relationship, so we were, consequently, cut off from all that is good and love. Relationships with people here haven't done so hot since sin entered the scene. Thank God that, in love, He gave His Son.

Jesus gave his life on the cross to restore relationship.

Relationship restored vertically, between God and us.

Relationship restored horizontally, between us and other people.

It's all about relationship.

[be]

Questions:

On a scale of 1-10, how loving would others say that you are? (10 is good)

How many people do you pray with regularly?

When was the last time someone who's far from God told you there's something different about you and the way you love others?

Don't worry.

I'm asking myself these same questions. It just brings us both back to the fact that we have so far to go and we are helpless to change without God.

Take a minute to pray.

[be] a follower

How many sermons can you remember?

I mean, how many can you tell me the introduction, four points and the conclusion. You know “the meat”.

Didn't you take notes?

I'm kidding.

Honestly, unless you're some kind of savant with an amazing memory, you can't remember much. Don't worry. I don't either. I can only tell you a few things that I've learned from messages, most of which are stories that people have told about applying truth to their own lives. I can tell you a lot that I've learned from people. I'm talking about people who didn't just give a message but lived it.

Truth is more caught than it is taught. More than what I hear, I pick up things from people. These relationships create movement in my life.

Have you ever thought about Jesus' plan to change the world?

He followed the words of the Father and asked that His disciples follow Him. Twelve guys followed. They changed the world forever.

Think about this for a minute.

This works.

Many times instead of focusing on a person that we want to be like, we focus on the people that we don't want to be like. I've met a lot of people that live their lives purposed around not being like their parents or someone else that hurt them. Sometimes they will actually become like them because they focus so much of their attention. I once heard a wise pastor named Jerry Cook say, "You'll never have a positive result if you focus on a negative." In relationship with God you have this same choice.

Will you focus on people that you want to be like or on people that you don't?

It's kind of like surfing, which is something that I love. Wherever you turn your head to look, the board will follow. If you want to avoid hitting another surfer in the water, you need to look away from him to where you want to be. Where you put your focus is where you will end up. It's also true that if I surf with someone who is better than me, I will improve much more quickly than on my own. I'll become more like them. Maybe not overnight, but it will happen.

Sometimes if we have a difficult time with a particular sin, it can become the focus. The whole of our relationship with God becomes based around this sin and we end up being stuck in a vicious cycle. How weird is that? Imagine if we focused all that energy on being like another person. The person of Jesus or another person that is following Jesus well.

My friend Chris is a guy who's actually doing this. We were talking recently about what it means when Paul said to "Follow me as I follow Christ".

Is he just being arrogant to say that he was following Christ so perfectly that others could follow Him instead? No, because he also calls himself "the worst of sinners" in a different letter. (1 Timothy 1:15-16) So, he couldn't mean that we should follow the places of sin in his life, but only the places where we see Christ.

People will fail you, but everyone knows someone that follows Christ well. So follow. Don't follow everything that they do, just the places where you see Jesus. It could be a pastor, elder, or a small group leader, but it doesn't have to be. It could just be a normal person that loves Jesus. I have a friend who is an architect by trade, but does pin striping on motorcycles and tattooing on the side. He's the last guy that will get up and give a sermon, but a great follower

of Jesus. Plus he always has time to listen. Whenever I get to talk to him I always feel encouraged. As followers of Christ we'll grow by doing life deeply with those people.

It's the call of Christ, to follow!

My friend Colby once said that, "Jesus isn't just looking for believers. He's looking for followers!"

Check this out.

The first thing Jesus said to His disciples was "Come, follow me," ... "and I will make you fishers of men."

Matt. 4:19

We follow Him.

The last thing He said to them was "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19-20

Others follow us.

This is something else to consider. When you follow well, others will follow you.

You may not consider yourself a leader, and I certainly don't think everyone is called to be one or should be one. Don't feel that pressure. But, you do have to realize that we all have influence, and we are all called by God to live in such a way that our lives point others to Christ.

It's bigger than you and I. It's God's plan to change the world. As we follow, others will follow.

[be]

Questions:

Who are two or three people in my life that I follow (or could follow)?

How deep does that relationship go? 1-10 (10 = I can talk about anything)

What are the places that others could follow in my life?

Where do I find it difficult to follow others? What could that mean?

Pray.

[be] authentic

The other day I heard someone refer to a person as a “hard worker in his heart.” This is not what you want someone to say about you. This is when you have great things in your heart to do, but the fact that you need to mention, “it’s in your heart” is because it has yet to really materialize in your life. Sometimes it’s really easy for our Christianity to become the same way.

Being authentic is more than thinking and believing the right things.

It’s way more about living right by being loving.

Being authentic is shown when people don’t like us and things don’t go our way. This also happens to be where a lot of the growth happens. That’s why we must be willing to go through stuff with God. It is these places where we see God at work and know that it was “only God.” That means sometimes people aren’t going to like you and things aren’t going to go your way. Being a

mature believer is not just having faith that those things will be fixed by God. God will show up, but He might be more interested in changing you in the midst of difficult circumstances. I do not believe that God makes bad things happen to you. He will work through it to bring about good and growth in you.

By the way, this is also where God's going to show Himself to others through it. This is just so they know that it has to be Him and not you. You're weak, broken, painful, and most vulnerable moments are the perfect places for His strength. His power made perfect in your weakness. Why wouldn't God want others to see that? So don't hide it. Boast about it.

The world doesn't see enough authentic Christians. Ask anyone who's not a Christian what they really think about us. If they were nice they might say that we're "like Christ in our hearts." Many people would say that they think most Christians are hypocritical. We have great

intentions, but we're not known for practicing what we preach. Sometimes we've become too busy going to church and doing lots of religious stuff that it takes away from our ability to just be real and love others. Sometimes we get caught up in the fake it till you make it mentality. Under this pressure to perform and perfect we shy away from vulnerable, transparent movements that could bring freedom and hope to those around us.

I think the world is looking for Christians who are the real deal. The kind of Christians who aren't perfect and aren't afraid to admit it. The kind whose love for God and others is sincere.

"Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

1John 3:18

"Love must be sincere."

Romans 12:9

We really should be the most loving people on the planet. That's where we become authentic.

Why aren't we? Why isn't our love sincere?

The reason why this book is loaded with so many hard, self-evaluative questions is this: We already have way too much knowledge for our ability to live and love others. In other words, the knowledge meter is way higher than the obedience meter. Plus, the more knowledge I gain, the more judgment I bring on myself... the more irrelevant I become for God's Kingdom.

Scary.

Gaining knowledge is not spiritual growth. And a lot of people mistake it for that. Sometimes gaining knowledge without applying it to yourself actually does damage.

"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."

1 Corinthians 8:1

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.”

James 1:22-25

Time and time again God's Word is screaming to us “don't just learn more, live it!”

Be different!

Be real!

Just like it's rare to find people that actually listen, it's also rare to find people who actually love genuinely.

When we truly un-package the love of God in our lives it becomes natural to live in that love and let it affect everything about us.

My friend David is a worship leader and he often says, "Don't sing the song. Be the song."

Don't just think it or believe it. Live it. Be it.

I think the world is looking and waiting for Christians to stop preaching the message and just be the message.

Praying is good too, but we need to stop just praying and wishing others well. We need to be willing to be the answer to our own prayers.

Be the prayer.

So, how do I be authentic?

Being doesn't have to try. Being is authentic. Doing, trying, or just knowing more isn't necessarily authentic. We can come daily to God with nothing, empty-handed and be filled with His truth, His love and His Spirit.

We can be with God.

We can be loving.

We can be.

[be]

Questions:

When I go through difficult times, what do others see in my life?

What's an area in my life that my actions don't line up with my words or beliefs?

How can I invite God into that area of my life?

How easy do I find it to be transparent and vulnerable with others?

Please pray.

This is not the end.

My two-year-old daughter Ruby has already won my heart and has me wrapped around her little finger. She's learned that if she wants to make me melt she can come up to me, lean in for a kiss and say "Daddy, I lawve you!" She hasn't quite learned how to say it right yet, but I don't care. I love her for who she is and would give my life for her in a heartbeat. I'm an imperfect father but think about how the Father feels about you. Don't you think He feels the same way?

He's already leaning into you.

"We love because he first loved us."

1 John 4:19

Just come to Him. Be loved. Be with Him in everything and in all that you do.

As we wrap this up, please know that is not intended to be the end all or the complete guide to spiritual growth. Whatever you do, don't take this book as another step-by-step guide.

Please.

The second we start checking boxes on the to do list or working through the steps, we miss the whole point. We're not done and will never be done.

God is looking for you. He wants to walk this journey with you, and you cannot walk it without Him. And, the end of this little book is not the end of the journey. It's the beginning.

There's way more.

I really hope that some of what I've learned about growing spiritually will inspire you to move forward in a vibrant, life-filled relationship with Jesus.

[be]

Endnotes:

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http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=Westminster_Shorter_Catechism&oldid=1001329
