

All Your Life

what it really means to live for Jesus

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1

Your Heart

It all boils down to your heart. This little organ, the size of your fist, pumping about a hundred thousand gallons of blood per day, is the essence of who you are.

News flash: If your heart stops working, you'd no longer be alive. If you've ever been trained for CPR, you know the first thing to check is the pulse. Back when I trained in medicine, we were taught to check for breathing first. But we've grown in our understanding of the human body, and today's standard of care is to bypass the breathing for the heart. Your heart is even more important than your next breath.

The heart is the center of it all. It's who you are. Without the heart, there is no life.

When it comes to following Jesus, it always boils down to your heart. God cares about your heart more than anything else in the world. God isn't looking for part of your heart. He's not content with occupying one room in your heart. Jesus' call to follow him is an all-in, leave everything behind, no looking back invitation. Anything less than that is not true Christianity.

In Luke 14:33 Jesus said it like this: "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." Jesus didn't mince words.

Is your heart God's, or is it still yours?

Let me explain. You aren't a Christian because you keep a certain set of rules. You can avoid sex before marriage and give your life to



feeding the hungry in the slums of the world, and still not be a follower of Jesus. A lot of people who don't believe in Jesus also do those things.

You can join a church and sign their roster and even get baptized and still not actually be a Christian. You can call yourself a Christian but still not truly be a Christian.

You can even “follow Jesus” and still not really be a Christian. Following someone isn't exactly the same as knowing that person. If we've learned anything from social media, it's that we can follow anyone without having a clue who they truly are. But Jesus takes it a step further. He's not looking for people to just casually know him. I know my neighbors, but I almost never talk to them. I have little relationship with them. Knowing about Jesus is a good start, and so is the desire to follow him, but Jesus invites us to something deeper. He invites us to give him our hearts. He invites us to become totally and completely his, to be fully surrendered to him. He invites us to a whole new way of living. He invites us to move past outward change, and to become a whole new person with a whole new heart.

Most of us are pretty comfortable with changing our behaviors and convincing ourselves that we're a new person. The call to follow Jesus is bigger and bolder. While following Jesus does lead to change, it's not behavioral modification that Jesus calls us to. It's total heart transformation. We think that if we change the way we act, we're good. But it's the other way around: When your heart is right, your actions will follow.

Truly living a Christian life means more than rules or outward actions or a set of beliefs. It means giving Jesus your heart.

There were plenty of people who followed Jesus back in his day that didn't even like him. Some were there for the show. Others were there to bait him. There were a few people, though, who were interested in knowing more about Jesus. These were the ones who eventually understood that following Jesus isn't something we do with just our minds. *It's about our hearts.*



God wants your heart, not your money or your schedule or your career. When you give God your heart, everything else falls into place.

But What Does It Mean to Give God Your Heart?

Our heart isn't just the organ that beats and pumps our blood—the “heart” is also a symbolic idea representing the center of a person's emotions, intellect, and spirit. It's the source of a person's thoughts, decisions, and character. When you give God your heart, you're giving him your *all*. You're basically giving up your life for him. And while that might sound extreme, remember that God went first. God loved us first and God gave himself for us first. When we give him our hearts, it's simply our response to the love he has already given us.

It's incredibly awesome and deeply personal. Your mom can't do this on your behalf, and neither can your best friend. This is something you've got to do on your own. Only you can give all of your heart to Jesus.

Here's how Paul described it in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

It's impossible to read Paul's words and not conclude that following Jesus is a big deal. It's a lot more involved than rubbing a bottle and hoping the genie (a.k.a. God) will make your dreams come true.

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation,” Paul wrote. This is major surgery. It's not just a minor procedure where you nip a little of this and tuck a little of that. This is more like a total heart transplant. At the end you become an entirely new person.

Do I sound a bit high-level? It's important you understand this point because so many Christians miss it. Instead of focusing on the heart, the first thing we do when things go wrong is focus on our behaviors.



Do you remember when your faith started to become really important to you? At first it was all fire and excitement. John, the beloved disciple, calls this early love “first love.” I grew up in the church and gave my life to Christ as a kid, but there came a point in my life where I wanted to own my faith. That season of first acknowledging that God alone is all we need and want is a special time for every follower of Jesus. It’s like the honeymoon phase of Christianity. You’re excited about reading the Bible. You’re excited about going to church. You’re excited about prayer and journaling and going to your small group and hanging out with your Christian friends. You’re even excited about giving up your savings for the sake of Christ.

When your heart is set ablaze for God, there is nothing you won’t do for him.

But just like buying a new car, the novelty eventually wears off. This is when things can get dangerous.

When the novelty of following Jesus starts to wear off, most people do the logical thing: We ignore our hearts and keep up with the outward behaviors that make us look like Christians. We may read our Bibles more. We may pray harder. We may go to church more. We may tithe a little bit more. We may go on a mission trip. When that doesn’t work, we try even harder. We may join a second small group. We may memorize more Scripture.

It takes a while, but eventually we figure it out: Behaving like a Christian doesn’t draw us closer to God. In fact, it will leave us exhausted—and that risks even alienating us from him.

Your heart was never meant to be refreshed by Christian work. Only a deeper sense of God’s presence in your life will ignite your walk with God and produce the abundant life.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus called it abiding.

Everything in the Christian life flows out of abiding in Christ.

After Jesus had risen from the dead, he found two disciples on the road to Emmaus who were still reeling from the death of Jesus.



They had lost all hope. Jesus spent the afternoon with those disciples, teaching them from the Old Testament all about himself. Even though he didn't tell them who he was, when they eventually figured it out, their response was classic: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

They figured out what it often takes us a lifetime to understand: God moves in our hearts before he changes our circumstances.

It's easy to lose sight of your heart in your attempt to follow Jesus.

It's a lot easier to make following Jesus about the things we do and the activities we engage in, but following Jesus is far more than just the things we do.

It's about who you are. And it's about who you're becoming.



You Have a New Identity

So, who are you, really? It seems like a simple question, but it's not.

Try coming up with a social media handle and you'll get what I mean. We work hard to capture who we are in a handful of words. We want to lead with the most important thing about us, but we inevitably fail to capture it as well as we'd like.

Christian. Doctor. Writer. She/Her. Sister. Daughter. Humanitarian. Lebanese American. What does that even mean? Who exactly am I and how does that affect the way that I live?

In an age of identity obsession and identity confusion, Christians are not exempt from the struggle to understand who we are.

Did you know that the word *Christian* didn't first get used until AD 40 in Antioch? Dr. Luke, a friend and travel companion of Paul, used the word to describe the first Christians in Antioch in Acts 11:26.

Before they were called Christians, Christians used to be called *Nazarenes*, *disciples*, and at times they were even called *followers of the*



way. My favorite reference to Christians is in Acts 17, where they were called people who turned their world upside down. I love that.

Think about it, though. It wasn't Christians who called themselves followers of the way. This is how *others* described them. The trouble with describing Christians by what we do is that it can confuse us. To simplify Christianity to being a mere follower of Jesus can lessen the seriousness of what it means to be a Christian.

It can confuse us into thinking that being a Christian is something we do or believe rather than who we are. But being a Christian is much more than just the things we do or the principles we believe.

In fact, our identity as a Christian is not about *who* we are, but *whose* we are. Instead of defining ourselves as merely Christian, I'm learning that a better way to refer to ourselves is "not our own" or "Christ's." A Christian is someone who no longer owns their own life. Christ bought us with a price. The moment we give our life to Jesus, we become his.

This changes everything.

Until we see our identity as "not our own" we will continue to struggle with understanding who we are.

In other words, when you see your identity as "Christ's," you can stop being so focused on all the other labels that are given to you in life. You're no longer just your sexuality, or your education, or your net worth, or your social media platform, or your looks. All these things are part of your story, but who you are—your core identity when you give your heart to Christ—is this: You're his! You're not your own.

The apostle Paul tried to explain it like this: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price."

This doesn't mean that you are now a robot without a will of your own. But it does mean that because your heart is now God's, every



decision you make, every value you hold, every relationship you keep, every goal you make no longer has to be done alone.

Your identity in Christ changes everything about you.

This creates a tension in the Christian life that may not have been there before you gave all to Christ. Before you fully surrendered your heart to Christ, you were likely living under the assumption that you ran the show called “Your Life.” You were trained to believe certain things about your autonomy and encouraged to act a certain way. As you’ve given your all to Jesus, that old way of thinking fades away. Now words like *surrender* and *yielding* have become part of the new you. Prayer becomes the process through which you give space to God to direct your decisions. Spending time in God’s Word becomes the means that equip you with the language to guide your next steps in life. Conviction is what happens when there is a noted dissonance between the way you’re choosing to live and the way God wants you to live. Repentance is how you get back into alignment with God.

Being God’s is a reset of your entire being. It’s a total transformation. And it’s not always popular in a culture that values autonomy and independence.

It isn’t easy to be a Christian. Dying to self is never easy.

But we can’t say we weren’t forewarned. In Luke 14:27-33 (NIV), Jesus himself used some pretty strong language to give us fair warning:

Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, “This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.”

Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with



twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

Jesus certainly isn't marketing some easy version of Christianity here! But he is speaking the truth.

To follow Jesus, we have to give up everything—starting with our heart.

And until we see ourselves as totally God's, and no longer our own, we will continue to struggle in the Christian life.

Who Calls the Shots in Your Life?

So to recap: Being a Christian is about becoming God's and involves a total transformation of everything you are.

This process requires you to yield everything you think you know to become more and more *God's*. You no longer call the audibles in your life. God does.

This reminds me a bit of driving with my mom in the car. She believes it's God's will for her life to call the shots on my driving. It's the most aggravating thing in the world. She wants to control how I drive—and I *don't* want her to control my driving. As a result, there is tension. One of us has to eventually give up control, and I always think it's not going to be me, but in reality, she usually wins (which drives me nuts).

Giving up control is hard, but it's made easier with love. Love is the secret that makes us do things we never thought we would do and agree to things we didn't think we would ever agree to.

Have you ever been in love? People who are in love do crazy things. They eat foods they never thought they would try. They go



places they said they'd never go. They watch movies they used to laugh at. They participate in hobbies they never would have dreamed of doing.

Love is the potion that not only invites us to give up control but enables us to do it willingly—without fear.

When I was sixteen, I fell in love with Jesus. I know how corny it sounds, but it's true. Even though I'd heard about Jesus my whole life, and even though I might have asked him to come into my heart when I was seven, my first real experience with God happened at camp after I graduated from high school. One night after hearing a sermon that captured my heart, I went outside and looked up at the sky and had my first adult conversation with God. I told him I loved him. He reminded me he loved me first. I told him I wanted my life to be his from that moment on. He assured me I wouldn't regret it. The next morning, I came across Philippians 1:6 in the NIV, and it has remained my life verse to this day.

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It basically says that God will never leave me and will never stop calling the shots in my life. I love that verse.

In reality, the concept of God running your life is awesome when you're living off the fumes of a revival meeting, or a weekend retreat, or a night of worship, but when real life hits, it's easy to lose sight of that love.

Real life is what happens when you hit your first big disappointment with God.

Like when you pray for something that you want so badly, but God doesn't give it to you. Or when you wait on God and instead of things getting better in your life, they seem to get worse. Or the door to your dream suddenly slams in your face. Or the people around you seem to be sailing through the dreams you thought God would accomplish in



your life. Or your hope of a turnaround dies a painful death that not even the best CPR will revive.

Real life happens when you get overlooked for a job, or broken up with by the love of your life, or hurt by people you didn't expect would hurt you.

Real life happens when you trust God to run the show, but instead of life moving forward, it feels like he's lost control of the steering wheel.

Real life hurts. Real life makes you question the goodness of God in your life. Real life throws you back all the way to the Garden of Eden, where Eve forgot how much God loved her.

It's easy to lose sight of God's love when you're hurting—and that's where the problems begin.

But God hadn't stopped loving Eve in the garden, and he'll never stop loving you. And God hasn't lost control of your life in your pain. The very place where you feel like God has abandoned you is the very place where he longs to show you his love.

Why does it work this way? Why is it that pain can both hurt us and be used by God to transform us? I wish there were an easier way.

There are many theories and books written on the topic (including books I've written myself about pain), but here is the simplest way I can explain it to you: *Faith is the purest expression of love that says, "I still want God."*

We can talk a big game about loving God and following him, but it's when we're hurting that our true colors show. Do we really love God? Or do we just love what God can do for us? Or put another way, are we really *God's*, or are we trying to make God ours?

Pain is the place where faith must be practiced.

When you're hurting because of a medical diagnosis that ends your dreams of playing your favorite sport, your faith in God is your declaration of your love for him.



When you're frustrated because you can't seem to break free from the pull of pornography, your faith in God is your declaration of a love that is greater than human love or sexual satisfaction.


When you're suffering because you're still broke though you're working your butt off, your faith in God is your declaration of a love that is greater than financial security and worldly comforts.

When you're betrayed by your friends who no longer want to hang with you now that you're a follower of Jesus, your faith in God is your declaration of a love that is alive and overcomes loneliness.

While pain has the potential to destroy your faith, it's also your opportunity to experience God's love even more.

A lot of focus in Christian discipleship is on obeying God and doing what he wants, but we forget that so much of the language of obedience in Scripture is rooted in love. The main reason to obey God is because we love him.

Obedience is about choosing love over desire, and when it comes to desires, God wants you to want him.



God Wants You to Want Him More than Anything

God longs for a relationship with us. Throughout the pages of Scripture we see God's longing to be with us. God pursues us. He puts up with us when we fail him. He forgives us when we don't deserve it. He waits for us when we ignore him. He wants us to want him more than anything. He wants us to love him more than anything.

The longer I follow Jesus, the more I see who I truly am, and the more unbelievable it becomes for me to understand that God still wants to be with me!

Many followers of Jesus get so caught up with trying to impress God with our good works. We think that if we can just do more Christian



activities and speak more Christian words, we'll somehow get a little more of God's love in our lives.

But here is the unshakable truth we can't escape: God loves us perfectly and completely and unconditionally, and we never have to do a thing to earn it.

God loves us so much that he wants to be with us. He also wants us to want him. He wants us to want to be with him and to spend time with him and to listen to him. He wants to be with us so much that he was willing to lay down his life for us.

It's why he came to earth in the form of a man named Jesus. It was his way of demonstrating to us how much he wanted to be with us! To quote John again:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

It's also the reason he was willing to die for us on the cross. Jesus gave his life to remove the barrier of sin and bring us back into relationship with God. Peter describes it like this in 1 Peter 3:18 (NIV):

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

Jesus wants us to want him more than we want a job or a promotion or marriage or kids. He wants us to want him more than other people's affirmation and acceptance. He wants us to want him more than we want the one thing we think we can't live without.

God wants us to want him because he knows how he's created us. He knows that until we love him more than anything else, we won't be completely satisfied and happy. And God loves us so much that he *wants* us to be completely satisfied and happy.

In life, we often find ourselves in situations in which we must choose to give up our understanding of how we think things should be. This is impossible to do without love.



When your heart has been captured by a love that will never hurt you, you're finally free to walk in faith. You're free to be happy even if you're going through a rough patch. You're free to rest a little instead of hustling so hard. You're free to love those who might have hurt you in the past and those who have no intention to stop hurting you. You're free to be your true self. You're free to admit the struggles you face. You're free to say no to things you want to say yes to. You're free to be you.

Love frees you to be you with all of your quirks and idiosyncrasies and gifts and talents.

Love is who God is.

Love is also the place where God longs for you to be.

Since he is love, he wants you to be with him for ever and ever. How awesome is that?

When your heart is fully God's, and you believe how deeply he loves you, you can find peace in this life. Everything else in your life will fall into perspective. You'll no longer think of following Jesus as a list of things you need to remember to do in order to get your prayers answered. You'll stop worrying about how bad of a day you had and how you can be a better Christian tomorrow. You'll stop caring as much what people think of you or how your boss treats you.

When your heart is God's and you believe how deeply he loves you, you can do anything in life that God wants you to do. And believe me, he wants you to do amazing things. Don't take my words for it, though. Listen to what Paul writes in Ephesians 3:17-19 (NIV):

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.



I have goosebumps reading these verses. I still can't get over this kind of love.

We're going to cover a lot of ground in this book, but love must be the foundation for everything else that I will say.

God loves you so much. Nothing will ever stop his love for you. To be a follower of Jesus is simply to learn to live in this love.



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