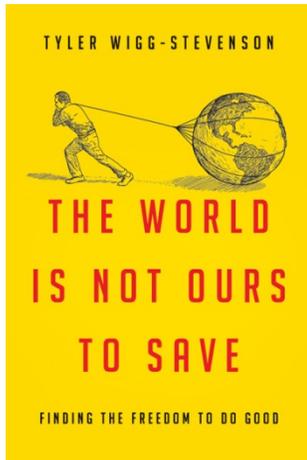




# BOOK EXCERPT



*The World Is Not Ours to Save:  
Finding the Freedom to Do Good*

Available March 2013

\$16, 220 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-3657-4

## The Two Futures Project and the Future of Activism

Often it is the questions you are asked, not the answers you are given, that prove most important in the long term. . . . *What would you be willing to do to get rid of nuclear weapons?*

If you have ever been twenty-two and passionate about a cause, you know the answer to this one: anything. You would do anything. Visions of dramatic, world-saving actions filled my mind: a hunger strike in front of the White House or chaining myself to the fence of a nuclear base. But as my imagination played out these scenarios, I quickly saw their vanity. . . . My daydream moved on to less ostentatious ambitions, like just showing up to labor against nuclear weapons every day for the rest of my life. But this vision, albeit more longsuffering, led to the same place: the nuclear weapons system could smile and swallow my sacrifice as if nothing had ever happened.

It hit me as I walked briskly down a hallway on the mezzanine level at the south side of the Fairmont Hotel: I was *willing* to do anything. But there was nothing I *could* do. This realization dropped me midstride. I saw a service stairwell to my right, slipped inside and crumpled onto the rough concrete stair. And I wept in despair for the world I so desperately wanted to save from itself.

Then, for the first – and, to date, the clearest – time in my life, I heard the voice of God.

God said, *The world is not yours, not to save or to damn. Only serve the one whose it is.*

I walked out of the stairwell with a wet face and a peaceful heart.

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In the more than a decade that has passed since that day, I have become an insider practitioner in the world of Christian activism and an eyewitness to the hopes, fears and passions that mark a rising generation of would-be world changers. This book emerges from that vantage point. For this reason, it is a deeply personal book as well: the criticisms I level find their first target in my own work and tendencies, and the hopes I articulate for faithful Christian work and witness are those I aspire to.

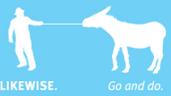
The path that I walked out of that stairwell in the Fairmont Hotel led me eventually to seminary and ordained ministry. That's another, longer story. But even as my commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons was transformed by my emerging faith, I never left the

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# BOOK EXCERPT



**Tyler Wigg-Stevenson** is the founder and director of the Two Futures Project, a movement of Christians for nuclear threat reduction and the global abolition of nuclear weapons. He also serves as chairman of the Global Task Force on Nuclear Weapons for the World Evangelical Alliance. Tyler began his involvement in nuclear policy over a decade ago under the late U.S. Senator Alan Cranston at the Global Security Institute, on whose board he still sits, and as study assistant to the Rev. Dr. John Stott. He is the author of *Brand Jesus: Christianity in a Consumerist Age*, a contributing editor at *Sojourners* magazine, politics columnist at *Relevant*, and a regular writer and speaker on matters of faith and public life. His work has been profiled by a variety of secular and Christian media, including the *Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *CQ*, *WORLD*, *ABC World News*, and PBS's *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*. Tyler is an ordained Baptist minister with degrees from Swarthmore College and Yale Divinity School.

cause altogether. And, in early 2007, when an old friend from the disarmament community phoned to ask whether I could help bridge the divide between nuclear security and religious communities, I discerned a call from God to return and give all my attention and energy to that issue.

The result was an experimental outreach to Christians on the dangers of nuclear weapons in the twenty-first century, focusing primarily but not exclusively on theologically and politically conservative, evangelically minded Protestants – that is, the types of Christians who are not known for their participation in “Ban the Bomb” campaigns. Our goal was to get the threat and evil of nuclear weapons back on the church’s radar and thus to create a morally grounded, nonpartisan body of believers who could act faithfully and create constructive change. After a couple years of behind-the-scenes outreach to key Christian leaders, the Two Futures Project (2FP) debuted as a public cause in 2009.

I believe that this movement’s work has helped to focus new attention on nuclear weapons as a matter of faith. Stories about evangelicals against the Bomb have appeared in national and regional media, both Christian and secular, in print, television and radio. *Relevant* magazine’s tenth anniversary issue cited our work as one of the top fifty ideas to emerge in their decade of reporting. Major Christian conferences like Q, Jubilee and Catalyst have featured 2FP’s work. In 2011, the board of directors of the National Association of Evangelicals, representing more than forty-five thousand churches and tens of millions of American Christians, voted without objection to adopt a new policy position on nuclear weapons, reflecting the types of concerns 2FP has focused on. The World Evangelical Alliance, representing more than 600 million Christians in 129 national alliances worldwide, has engaged the issue by forming the Global Task Force on Nuclear Weapons. With similarly renewed attention to nuclear weapons in mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic circles, I believe that Christians are moving as one in the right direction and that the issue is with us to stay.

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As a thirty-something, my hopes and fears for this generation are the hopes and fears I have for myself. Both have been amplified with increased exposure to how I have seen us living out our faith. I believe that this generation bears extraordinary promise, but the fulfillment of this promise depends on our ability to confront our particular weaknesses. That is, the shift to systems thinking is not simply about having a more comprehensive perspective on complex phenomena like poverty and ecology. It also often means that we engage such issues in a way that presupposes that, or at least acts as if, the human condition can be fixed through human effort – that the world is ours to save. This is a problem.

The reasons this belief makes for a fragile spiritual foundation for world engagement are the

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# BOOK EXCERPT



central concern of this book. We are already seeing hairline fractures, like the “cause fatigue” I increasingly encounter among younger Christians. This doesn’t mean there’s something wrong with causes per se, but rather that we need a better way to engage them – we need a sense of enduring calling.

Christians heaven-bent on saving the world make me fear for the church of ten, twenty or thirty years from now – when, barring the Lord’s return, the world is profoundly different than it is now but still irretrievably broken, violent and wicked. I wonder what will happen to us in the process.

*Will zealous young Christians who are sold out for Christ eventually age out of faith-based activism?*

Will zealous young Christians who are sold out for Christ eventually age out of faith-based activism, leaving our radical commitments for the safety of a private, middle-class “churchianity” that fits better with the demands of kids and family?

Will we go the other direction and reduce a gospel-proclaiming faith to its ethical and moral components, neglecting evangelism and sanctification in favor of a social program to which Jesus and the church are optional at best and superfluous at worst?

Will we suffer disillusionment and disappointment en masse, abandoning Christ in the process, as the passage of time relentlessly reveals to us that this will not be the generation specially equipped to solve the world’s problems?

Will we respond to a calamitous event in a way that reveals that we have been rocky soil for the word of God, from which it blows away, rootless, during a time of testing?

I would not be surprised if future generations criticize ours along precisely such lines, though I hope they will be more merciful and charitable than we have often been with those who preceded us.

And yet none of these outcomes is a foregone conclusion. There is still a better way.

*– Adapted from chapter one, “The World Is Not Ours to Save”*

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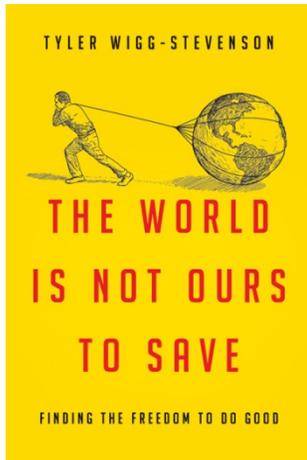


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# TALKING POINTS



*The World Is Not Ours to Save:  
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## Saving the World Is Beyond Your Pay Grade

Like a splash of cold water, Tyler Wigg-Stevenson's new book, *The World Is Not Ours to Save: Finding the Freedom to Do Good*, offers a bracing reminder of who's actually in charge of redeeming the world. As we remember that it is only God who is able to usher in his kingdom, we can pursue acts of justice with a sense of freedom rather than obsession, anxiety or overweening pride.

In this timely corrective, Wigg-Stevenson explores issues such as

- Why do so many once-eager activists end up burning out?
- What factors make activism sustainable?
- What are some of the lies we can come to believe about our calling as we work for change?
- What causes us to misdiagnose the problems we see in the world?
- How might we unwittingly misrepresent God as we pursue acts of justice?
- What is the relationship between God and our efforts to make a difference?
- What must we remember about the true nature of the human condition?
- How do our present-day actions relate to God's coming kingdom?
- What are the contours of the kingdom of God?
- How can a results-minded Christian best seek the kingdom of God?
- Why is understanding the nature of our calling so critical?
- How might we go about discerning our calling?
- What is a good working definition of "Christian activism"?
- What are some different methods of engagement for Christian activists?

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