

EXCERPT



What Jesus Intended

Finding True Faith in the Rubble of Bad Religion

July 18, 2023 | \$20, 192 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0495-1

After four decades of ministry, Anglican bishop Todd Hunter is no stranger to betrayal and pain in the church. Still, he has hope. He believes more than ever that Jesus is who the world needs and that Jesus has plans for his followers. In *What Jesus Intended*, Hunter offers a vision for emerging from the rubble of bad religion and rebuilding faith among a community of sincere believers. By unpacking the purposes of Jesus, we can expose twisted, toxic religion for what it is and embrace the true aims of the gospel.

Throwing Oneself on the Couch of Religious Despair

Lord knows how many times I have tossed churchly keys and thrown myself on a couch of religious despair. I have felt the expansive loneliness of not being able to turn apprehension about the church into prayer.

I've been embroiled in the ups and downs of church my whole life. I know how religious sausage is made—both the ingredients and the process. As an insider to the church, I know all the yuck of what we are made of and how we fail to deal with it righteously. Despair, dejection, hopelessness, impotence, irritation, anger, and depression have knocked on the door of my heart with great persistence over a long period of time. To be fair, there are of course wonderful moments in ministry where we see light bulbs of insight shine bright, healing come with its joy, and deliverance from evil relieve the victim and spread hope and peace to their family and friends.

However, viewed from any number of angles, the church is in oodles of trouble. Modern forms of media make it impossible for the church to hide her sins, her hypocrisy. The church's easy dismissal or even dehumanizing hate for those she deems to be wrong adds to her failure to look and sound anything like Jesus. Compelling or even plausible reasons to consider faith in Jesus and to attend church are, for many, hard to find. Jesus seems eclipsed by the dark shadow of bad religion.

That said, after long years working in the church, both sinning and being sinned against within her, I still believe in the body of Christ—the church. Why? Because I believe in Jesus now more than ever. Jesus summons and establishes the church, his body, the ones elected to keep the movement going started by Jesus.

I am captivated by Jesus' intrinsic goodness and his inherent wisdom, and by the fact that his power was always selflessly exercised for the good of others. I am motivated to embrace his movement by the notion that even right now he is living the most consequential life imaginable as he stewards humanity and all God's creation to its intended fulfillment. I find it stunningly compelling that he invites me, and you, and unchurched doubters—with our sins, reservations, errors, and confusions—to be in on that story.

It Has Always Been This Way

Messed-up church is the way it has always been. Church history does not unfold like a series of ups and downs that one might trace on a line graph: up at the resurrection, down at Doubting Thomas, up at the church fathers, down at Constantine, up at the Reformation, down in our day. No, the reality of church life is that it unfolds like train tracks, protracted stretches of both/and, of simultaneity, of good and bad religion all mixed up together in local churches and in individual people.

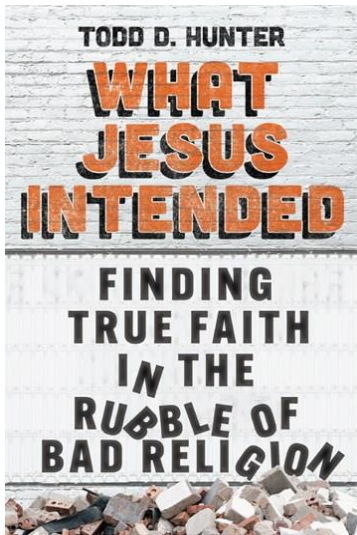


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"In an age like ours, when people and groups claiming to be Christian do not ostensibly appear to look, think, act, or sound like Jesus, there can be nothing more important than the recovery of the absolute centrality of Jesus for the life of the disciple and for the church that claims his name. In this book Todd Hunter does precisely that—he calls us to a recalibration of our lives to our magnificent Founder so that we might be authentic witnesses in a watching world."

The problematic elements in the body of Christ have been in play since, with twelve close friends, Jesus roamed Nazareth, Galilee, Judea, and Samaria. That band of followers, and the historic body of which Jesus is the head, has never been perfect. Skeptical onlookers would have always had ample reason to reject Jesus because of the close company he kept. Peter, after protesting that he would never do so, denied Jesus. "There you go," an onlooker might have said, "I knew Jesus' followers were hypocrites!" Like angry marketing agents, whose message was not cutting through the clutter, James and John wanted to call down fire on whole cities who they deemed did not welcome Jesus with enough enthusiasm. I can hear a skeptic saying: "Christians are emotionally unstable and should not be trusted with power!" Jesus washed the feet of Judas the deceiving betrayer, to which someone might respond: "Those friends of Jesus are in it just for the pieces of silver they get out it!"

The church does not need to be perfect for the purposes of God to advance. But that is not an excuse for the church to be an agent of darkness or abuse that forces unbelievers to grope for the God who is actually very close. Perfection is not the goal—rather, the goal is to be people whose lives suggest the plausibility of the Christ-story.

-Taken from chapter 1, "Am I the Only One Who Thinks This?"



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“Todd reminds us that the church is not a place to go to, simply another meeting, but the way God has chosen to make himself known in our world.”

—**Ed Stetzer**, professor and dean at Wheaton College, executive director of the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center.

Bishop Todd Hunter

“Like a horrific scene from a war zone, we are walking through the rubble of our failed churches. From here Todd Hunter speaks. Refusing to smooth over the grievous sins of the church, Hunter leads us steadfastly on a course to reconstruct our approach to church by going deep with Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, the one constant amid the ruins of failed religion. A gifted thinker, compassionate pastor, and seasoned leader, Hunter guides us through our pain. For all those besieged by the hurts of a failed church, What Jesus Intended arrives at this most crucial of moments to be the balm for our wounded souls.”

—David Fitch, Lindner Chair of Evangelical Theology at Northern Seminary

Bishop Todd D. Hunter (DMin, George Fox University) leads Churches for the Sake of Others (C4SO), a diocese of the Anglican Church in North America and was the founding pastor of Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Costa Mesa, California. He was formerly the president of Alpha USA and the national director for the Association of Vineyard Churches. Todd is author of *Christianity Beyond Belief*, *Giving Church Another Chance*, *The Outsider Interviews*, *The Accidental Anglican*, *Our Favorite Sins*, *Our Character at Work*, and *Deep Peace*.

Teaching courses on evangelism, leadership in contemporary culture, and spiritual formation, Todd has been an adjunct professor at George Fox University, Fuller Seminary, Western Seminary, Vanguard University, Azusa Pacific University, Biblical Seminary, Northern Seminary, and Wheaton College.

Recently, Todd established The Center for Formation, Justice and Peace. The Center’s interdenominational community seeks to develop the Christlike character necessary to activate justice, leading to a life of deep peace for all people. Alongside trauma-informed spiritual director Vanessa Sadler, Bishop Todd hosts *Peace Talks*, a podcast that spotlights women and men who are working to undo oppression, leading to lives of deeper peace for all.

Visit Todd Hunter’s website at toddhunter.org
Follow Todd on Twitter: @bpToddHunter



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