

**Starving Jesus: 40 Days of Nothing**  
**Craig Gross and JR Mahon**  
**Sample Chapter**  
Buy book online: [www.starvingjesus.com](http://www.starvingjesus.com)

## **Chapter 1: Tend Not Talk**

### **THE TALK**

Some conversations have a way of finding an audience. Some excite, some anger, some become the rule for the cause. Yet some are a colossal waste of time. Others, we pray, continue into eternity.

There is one conversation going on right now. It starts and stops with every possible argument, thought, or dissertation man has for why church is the way it is. As believers, we hold this conversation close as we gather safely in our places of worship across this great country.

The conversation is usually kept behind closed doors. It's held between men and women who rarely deal with the unsaved and un-churched, people who have forgotten what the outside world looks like, smells like, and feels like.

The conversation has no affiliation to any one body of organized religion or faith. It is neither Evangelical, Postmodern, nor Emergent; neither Left nor Right Wing. It has no Powerpoint presentation; it has no line of ancillary products and t-shirts. It does not drive itself with purpose, nor will it expire forty days from the date of purchase.

When the conversation starts it opens the painful truth about who we are as a church.

The sentences in this conversation sound like:

"Where is the love?"

"Why are we stuck in the pews?"

"Why is Sunday the only time we see Christians?"

"Why is everyone such a hypocrite?"

On rare occasions there are those willing to commit a form of spiritual suicide in the Christian subculture. Men and women who will yell from the rooftops, "Church sucks!" Although they are heard, their voices are quickly dismissed and rarely see the light of day. They are labeled fanatics and troublemakers and are asked not to come back.

Christ yelled the same type of thing once. It got him killed.

This conversation is on the tips of all sorts of tongues: your fellow churchgoers, your neighbors, your spouse, your kids your friends. And the most important part of this conversation is what you will say.

Welcome to the conversation.

JAMES 1:21-25

*“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”*

### **HONESTLY CRAIG**

I didn't go to church for years. Sure, I was an ordained minister. I grew up in the church. But ever since I left my job as a youth pastor it was tough to go back. I love football. I like to sleep in. I would like a weekend off. I can't sit through that boring service. I used all those excuses. I don't need more corporate worship in my life. I spend most of my weekends at church gatherings, conferences and church events. When I'm home for a weekend, it's kind of nice to sit back and relax. To be honest, for the first four years of my ministry it was tough to attend church.

Rarely would I tell people that I did not go to church, but the few times I did, I was almost always met with the same reaction: concern. People were concerned for me and my family. They chimed in with their opinion on the subject (not because I asked for it; they just gave it). It didn't matter that I know every rendition of “Lord I Lift Your Name on High,” and have heard and given more messages from the pulpit in four years than many people will hear in a lifetime.

“You don't go to church?” they'd say, shocked. And the people asking me this question were the ones that would never allow me close enough to them. But they go to church.

Why didn't I go to church? The reason was simple: I didn't want to. So, one day I decided I would go. Because church is not about me. It is not about what I like, what I want to sing, what I wish I could hear and how short I wish the service was. Sure, I have grown some. I have a family now. I have a wife who spends more time at home on the weekends than I do and who wants to connect with people other than just her husband.

Bottom line, I decided to go back to church to be part of the solution. To borrow an analogy from sports: you can't get anything done when you are not on the field. The bench, the sideline, and the on-deck circle are a lot different than the court, the field, and the plate.

I have been a part of two new church communities in the last three years. I don't agree with everything they have done, but I don't have to. Like I said: church is not about me.

It is about all of us.

God has me there and is using me and it is the least that I can do. As I write this book, I am in the middle of a life-changing move (more on that later) that involves a church. Why am I going to move my family halfway across the country? Because I saw what the church and Christians could be. Sure, it is just a glimpse, but it is exciting. I spent today looking at some of the nicest homes I've ever seen, and I can buy one because Michigan ain't California. The same day, I talked for hours with people I just met about living in community with one another and what that might look like. I get excited about both options.

Who am I? I'm just a screwed-up punk who grew up in a Christian home and lived most of his life in what was essentially a Christian ghetto. But late in my twenties, I realized there was a better, more abundant life outside of the ghetto.

### **HONESTLY J.R.**

I'll admit it: I have a hard time with most Christians. If I'm being really honest, most Christians make me sick. The toothy grins, the mixed bag of fake and highly suspect promises. I love the church, but hate its politics. I love the gathering, but hate the process. I love the principles, but hate the personalities.

Sinful thinking? Absolutely. I acknowledge it, and more times than not I'm asking forgiveness for it. I pray God helps me through that crap, I pray for love in my life, I pray my heart softens to all of His children. I pray that I will see *you* the way Christ saw *me* when he went to the cross.

I first saw Christ as a teenager. I will spare you the details, but here's the nut-shelled version. I fell flat when I was eighteen, drug-addicted, alcohol-soaked and morbidly morbid. Christ knocked and with the little energy as I had, I opened the door. It was hard, painful, joyful, crappy, funny, exhausting...peaceful. I was changed forever through very little effort. All I did was lay my life down for a God I have never seen, never touched, and never met. Crazy, right?

For those of you who think Christ was the inevitable last stop for a guy prone to addiction, you're right. I know the argument. I also know a few of you actually believe that only the shallow, weak-willed people of the world fall in love with Christ. That's true too.

I am quite content these days. In fact, I'm unbelievably peaceful. I no longer search for the next great thing to make me happy or get me going. I no longer yearn for things to make me satisfied. I am completely at peace with God.

Please note that: I'm at peace with God. That's important to know, because while I'm at peace with him, I am not completely peaceful with all the human beings around me, and some of them I don't even know. The bottom line is that God the Father has filled me with his Spirit and I'm adjusting as I go.

I am a sinner and a Christian. Sometimes those words are reversed in my day-to-day, but for the most part that's what I am. I am on a quest to understand my human condition in relation to my spiritual condition. Basically I'm just like you, if you also care about a guy who hung bloody on a cross.

### **WHO ARE THESE GUYS?**

The question becomes this: how can a porn pastor and a self-proclaimed street theologian have an opinion about the organized church? How can God take two sharp, edgy, politically incorrect voices that have a penchant for all things offensive and do anything with them?

We ask ourselves the same questions. We wonder why we talk about the things we do, why we resent the things we do, why we have to be involved in some of the most insane things going on in this crazy little subculture.

The one thing we wonder about most often is why things seem to stay so veiled and hidden in church circles. We wonder why the church doesn't talk about sex, drugs, booze, lying, stealing, cheating. Why do we insist on running from sin?

We are like all of you. We still doubt God at times. We fight coveting other people's cool stuff. We occasionally think we're not good enough. We wonder why God answers some prayers and not others. We get scared when we witness to people. We slack on our prayers and study at times. And sometimes we dream about taking a spiritual vacation. The kind of vacation that doesn't involve praying, studying, helping, dying to self and digging sin out of your life. It does sound good.

But sin--why can't we take sin head-on in the church? Why do we whisper about sin, creating layer after layer of shame for those struggling with it? Why are sinners running to self-help groups, reading books by doctors who have never seen a Bible, and logging hours with counselors who charge by the obsession?

Our leaders are doing everything they can to help us into the good life by placating our sinful natures. We need some good old-fashioned butt kicking in the form of honest talk, and not just in the Wednesday night small group. We need it on Sunday mornings—in the open—so the people—and there are many

of them—enslaved to sin can get up and say, “Thank God someone finally said something!”

## **THE FATE OF THE WORLD**

For well over a year, J.R. and I have traveled all over the country. We have seen both the very best and the very dreadful in church activities. When not traveling, we tend to be on the phone with one another determining the fate of the world through an ongoing conversation about faith and the modern church. We’re pretty much resigned to the fact that the church is killing itself.

This may sound pessimistic, but not a lot seems to be getting done anymore. Not a lot of love or compassion, and rarely do we see the church reaching into the human gutter of sin and pulling people out. Just a lot of sanctimonious speech and self-righteous indignation, all wrapped up in great marketing and advertising. There’s a whole lot of talk, but not a whole lot of action.

Too harsh? Maybe. But the seeming lack of everything really bums us out. Yet in some sick way it puts smiles on our faces. We take some kind of weird pleasure in knowing the church is tanking.

We’re sick of the Mega Bible Studies with post-modern verbiage; coupled with poetry and art parties for the “Emergent.” We wonder what happened to evangelism? What happened to talking about the Bible as God’s word? Or prayers that end in, “Amen,” instead of some long dissertation about being a speck of dust to His infinite hugeness.

We’re sick of something we call “Value Meal Theology.” You may not know this, but pastors all over the country are picking their sermons and lessons from the spiritual message buffets made by a few of the leading mega-churches.

Pastors are literally closing the door on the creative force of the Holy Spirit in favor of Value Meal Theology. Why create something new when you can use the other pastor’s words, along with his well-established marketing teams, great hair products, and cool, untucked shirts? If *he* looks good and sounds good, then I can copy him and *I’ll* be good. Why let the inspiration of the Holy Spirit drive the message to the people in your church when you can get a year-long subscription to a great feel-good, give-and-get program wrapped up in a bow, guaranteeing bigger and better results for your church? Never mind challenging yourself in the Word of God when you can shut yourself down on all fronts with another guy’s message. After all, if you’re having trouble increasing the numbers, go for what works.

We’re sick of pastors with planes, pastors with record deals, pastors with bodyguards, pastors that offer time alone with them (for a fee), and pastors with headshots.

What happened to pastors with sexual sin problems? Bring back Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker. At least we knew what we were getting. We're sick of not seeing Jesus in the pulpit. Instead, many of us are getting a weasel-y, feel-good message veiled with scripture so people won't run from the ten-million dollar building. We're sick of it!

And yet, happy. We're happy because something is on the horizon, and it ain't offering the five keys to spiritual freedom. It's a mad army of disciples who are just like us: sick and tired of the shepherds who only talk to their flock and don't tend it.

We know a lot of this rhetoric will fall on deaf ears. For some of you, this doesn't apply—you have an awesome pastor who does everything right. For others, you're hunkered down in your beliefs and aren't going to hear us no matter what we say.

We get that we can't write the definitive book on how to change church culture, because we hear the arguments all the time. One person says the church needs a bomb to shake it up. Others say, "Change? We don't need to change, we're doing great!"

Look, there are facts, figures, and stats we could roll out at this point, but we're content to let Barna be Barna. We'll take our chances with the Holy Spirit. We're stepping out in faith and asking you to consider your position, your role, and your life. We're asking you to radically evaluate your life and faith. We're asking for work in the name of God. It's almost too cliché to roll out this verse at this point, but it's a necessity we need to glue to our lives.

MATTHEW 5:13-16

*"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

Let your light shine so they can see your good deeds and praise the Father. We're advocating work: not speeches, not sermons, not four-hour weekend workshops. Just work.

1 JOHN 3:18

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

John got it. Get up, shut up, and do it. We don't care what it is. Just take some action. Anything short of sin should be the rule.

Give to the poor. Feed the hungry. Evangelize on a city street. Help a kid with cancer. Join the fight against pornography. Give your time to the elderly. Love your neighbor. Give time to a little kid. Make yourself available to a teenager who needs a mentor. Fix someone's car. Paint a house. Talk to a homosexual about their faith. Pull a drunk out of the gutter and get him something to eat. Give the homeless guy a place to crash. Bring the hooker to church. Spend the afternoon talking to an inmate at the local jail.

You get the idea. Bottom line: get off your butt and do something.

## **JUST JUNKIES**

J.R. and I consider ourselves reaction junkies. Not attention junkies. Please know that there's a big difference between the two. One says, "Please have something to say about what I'm saying or doing." The other says, "Please have something to say about me, my thoughts, my actions. Me...me...me."

Christ was a reaction junkie, of a sort. As a result he created the biggest reaction the world has ever seen.

We would love to say we are perfect examples of Christ. The truth is the enemy would love for us to screw this ministry thing up. He would love for us to crave the fame of our peers and say, "Oh look at us! Traveling the countryside getting people to react, just like Christ did. Aren't we great? Look at our big websites, look at our cool resources. Check out our five-part series and all the cool merchandising. Order today, we take credit cards!"

Satan does a great job ministering to those in the church who love the fame and power associated with helping others heal. You can get drunk on helping people change their lives. Unchecked, the lie becomes, "God had little to do with it and I am solely responsible for this new life." Believe the lie long enough and you start believing your own press. Satan then devours those seeking themselves by helping them celebrate their own self-centeredness. In the long run, the lie turns into a self-righteous theology that says, "I am the bottom line in peoples lives." The ministry quickly becomes about a man and what the man has to say or not say.

Satan teaches the self-centered and self-obsessed how to be what we call "born again lazy," how to actively fulfill selfish desires while keeping Christ at arms' length. Satan ultimately wants your reaction to be a call to do nothing for others. He's looking for you to say nothing, leave nothing, and offer nothing.

Jesus, on the other hand, seeks to mix it up. When Christ calls us, he engages our sin, not our dreams, goals, or passions. He died for our sin. He served

humanity by giving His life. He's asking you to do the same. Grab the people around you and serve them.

Jesus gets the human drive to be important and valued by other men. He is here to set us free from ourselves. The freedom needs to express itself in selflessness and service to and for others. He's looking for your reaction to the world to be that of a servant.

### **HIS REACTION**

Be in the world, not of the world. We love to screw this up. We automatically assume we should check out and pay no attention to the pop culture radar. Forget about the people who are led astray. Build a bunker in the back yard, cover the kids' eyes and ears and hope all your willpower and energy will be enough for the world to stay away. The problem with this behavior is when you follow Christ you will be asked to serve those who are of the world.

Then there are other Christians who take this in the opposite direction, focusing too much on pop culture, letting too much of the world come into their lives until they stop talking or thinking about Jesus altogether. Let's talk about *Lord of the Rings* or the latest episode of *Lost* instead.

When Jesus walked the earth he created reaction by simply living a sinless life and fulfilling the will of the Father. How great it must have been to watch him in a crowd as he got in the grill of the religious leaders. He didn't argue, he didn't resist; he simply laid the truth of his life in front of them.

Think about the amount of people who wanted to be near Jesus, to touch him, ask him questions, share a meal with him, and even go into business with Him. Some of these people wanted nothing to do with God the Father; they just wanted to hang with the popularity of the moment.

Jesus didn't build a bunker, move to Waco, or even encourage others to get away from the craziness of the world he was living in. In fact quite the opposite happened: he led his disciples to the cities and towns most likely to grab them up and kill them. And all along the way, he loved those who didn't have a clue as to what he was up to. Again, serving as he went, without the need to be stroked, accepted, or driven around in a Hummer.

Regardless of what his life looked like and how offensive his ministry was, Jesus continually told those around him to do two things: go and do. He healed people on the Sabbath. He was seen with whores. He questioned authority. He ate with tax collectors, and he pulled lepers out of the gutter. The first time he preached, people tried to kill him. Finally, he did the unthinkable. He gave himself willingly to die for a bunch of rag-tag, ungrateful sinners. He needed everyone around him to understand the value of love, which is action in other people's lives.

Do you honor his actions? Do you push the envelope for him? Is it important for you to express his life, his actions, to the people around you? Are you working for him or are you working for your own end? This question cannot be answered until we realize we all sin and fall short of his glory. Not my glory or your glory: His.

Therefore we are all the same. No need to bear the burden of terminal uniqueness. No need to think the next guy has it all together, because he doesn't. No one knows exactly what they are saying or doing, and if you find that person who claims or acts like they've got it all together, I'll show you a person who does not have Christ in his heart.

JAMES 5:13-16

*"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."*

J.R. and I love to push the envelope with our lives and ministries. Sometimes we are dead, and sometimes (more than I'd like to admit) we make massive mistakes in the name of Christ. We gripe and moan about both Christians and non-Christians alike. We pray to rid ourselves of the disdain we feel for others and freely admit this sin of haughtiness. Sometimes it sucks, but it is the reality of living with a savior who wants you to dig the sin out of your life.

We challenge. We call out sin. We fast and pray for days on end. We use words and cool design to fight large problems. We love the media and don't care if they're right or left of anything. We will go to porn shows, bars, crack houses, gutters, whorehouses, and churches. We will form relationships with people who don't know Christ and love them.

### **CHURCH DECAY**

A lot of what churches and pastors are doing today is just seeking attention. From big to small ministers, they are driving for man's fame, not God's. You can see it 24 hours a day, seven days a week on Christian TV. You flip it on and bam there it is, the needs of man, not the needs of God. From the need of money to the glory of personal treasure, it's all right there. A tightly-held belief that our God is a give-and-get sort of fella, just waiting for you to give, so he can do his part to improve your life.

Too harsh? I don't think so. Hit Matthew 5. What are the unchurched seeing?

When will we stop buying, giving, and believing that God is cool with us not doing anything for salvation and faith? When will we admit our sin one to another and get on with salvation?

What J.R. and I are hearing is sort of a rally call. It's hard to go anywhere in Christian circles without encountering the, "I want to start something new," conversation. People all over the country are starving for something new. The modern church has decided to feed on Value Meal Theology, and the creativity of the Holy Spirit has stopped because we are mass-replicating two or three different messages a month for the consumption of the American spiritual appetite. Nothing new, nothing inspired, and nothing created in the name of Christ. Topics to help with happiness and recovery from our bad self-images or failing self-esteem. We have made the message series commonplace and tacked on Thorazine-loaded Bible studies to placate American Christian appetites until the next CD or DVD is on sale in the lobby.

Church decay is real and the voices screaming "Rebuild!" are getting louder. When was the last time you questioned what the church was doing to get the Gospel into your community? When was the last time you stopped talking for an hour and just did something—anything—for someone other than yourself—and I'm not talking about being nice during the holidays. I'm talking about the middle of summer, or while you were on vacation, or when you were in a hurry, or when it was so inconvenient that it hurt you to do it.

The voices that want to rebuild are not the voices that are screaming, "I am the greatest in the church." The rebuilding voices sound like service. The last supper must have really bummed Jesus out. The brilliant disciples in all their wisdom argued about who was the greatest among them. They even took their squabble to Christ, who I'm sure had a lot on his mind. He looked at these guys who'd been with him some time, and shook his head. "Listen," he said. "The one who serves is greatest."

### **HONEST LIKE A GAY GUY**

I was on a plane not too long ago, where I sat in front an ex-homosexual. Yes, that's right, a real live gay man. Well... ex-gay man. He was brilliantly honest. He laid out his story to the guy sitting next to him and we all did everything we could to eavesdrop on this one.

Within minutes of hearing the ex-gay guy's testimony, our entire section of the plane knew more about him than his own mother did. He started out by telling the man sitting next to him, "I have problems, but so does everyone. I used to be very promiscuous. Not anymore," he said confidently. "Thank God, I am no longer gay but for a while I was. I was programmed that way. I'm convinced I was." By this time the back three rows of the plane were doing whatever they could to hear him. We couldn't wait for the next thing he was going say. It was better than any magazine or movie the airline could offer up.

The ex-gay guy went on to profess Jesus as his Lord and Savior. It was simply awesome. The guy next to him took it all in stride, a class act, never once turning away from him, always engaged and always ready for what was next, even asking questions as the story rolled out.

We couldn't decide who we were more proud of, the ex-gay guy or the dude sitting next to him.

He goes on letting the stranger, as well as three other rows, into his life. He let his strengths and weakness see the light of day. He gave us all a reason to be humble and transparent to one another. He shined a light on rows 17,18 and 19. A light the likes none of us has ever seen.

Who knows how many people were touched by that story. Who knows how many people stopped and chatted with God that day because an ex-gay guy shared his testimony loud and clear with a stranger on a plane?

As we got off that plane, we let him walk by. I smiled and stared hard at him trying to make a connection like, "Hey buddy, we get it, we're not gay, but we love the Lord. Thanks for the story and the courage it took to let it go." He walked by. No smile, no nothing; just walked by. We looked at each other knowing something wild had just happened. We will never forget his honesty and courage.

How we wished the entire church could have been on that plane. How we wished his honesty could be bottled and injected into every Christian in this country.

The ex-gay guy broke our hearts. He made us scream out to God for our own weakness. He made us praise God that he was even in the world. He made us want more from God. Most of all, he reminded us of our desire to wear our stories on our sleeves and roll it out with as much class and grace as he did.

We wandered over to baggage claim, staring at our new ex-gay guy hero. We were asking ourselves questions and understanding that this guy is the new church. He literally embodied what we, as disciples, need to be doing every minute of every day.

I looked up as he grabbed his bag off the carousel. "Too bad the church will never give this guy a voice. Perhaps that's why he does so well on planes," I said as we watched him slip outside and into a taxi. "Good luck ex-gay guy."

This whole encounter left us with questions. What happened to the admission of sin in the church? What happened to the idea we are all sinners and we must maintain accountability in our lives?

Jesus did his best to correct the disciples and their sin along the way, from Simon Peter, who the Lord called by two names depending on his actions, to Judas, who Christ had no problem calling out at the last supper. What's the example here? What about Paul giving it up in Galatians 6: 1-10?

*“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*

Paul was killing them with the idea of confronting sin and letting people know it's okay to admit and be honest about their sin. He also lets us know that, if we have received the instruction and get it, we should help others get it. Not simply run in the other direction hoping God will sort it all out. God does depend on us for a few things. We are not to simply stand idly by and wait for Divine instruction with every decision in our lives.

### **YOU DON'T HAVE TO**

We were in Dallas one weekend doing a porn talk. A few of the pastors and their wives had asked J.R. and I to lunch. Never turn down a lunch.

I was sitting across from one of the pastor's wives. She was a great lady with a wonderful personality, but she just didn't get it. J.R. explained to the table how we had helped a porn star get out of the business, raising \$14,000 for her to get her life together. It was a proud and wonderful example of how God works when people step forward to help others. To know God had used us to help another find redemption and start a new life in Christ was a great and humbling testimony for us to share.

This nice, southern, evangelical Christian pastor's wife looked across the table with her beautiful smile and well-intentioned life and stopped the Gospel dead: “No matter what you or others do, God would have taken care of it, if he wanted it done. It doesn't matter if you gave her money or not, God would have taken care of it if he wanted.”

My jaw hit the table as she finished her sentence and smiled at us like she had just dispensed the greatest Christian wisdom since Christ hung on the cross. I grabbed for my coffee cup and prayed, “Lord, don’t let me kill this lady.”

“So basically it’s okay to look the other way when we see others in need?” I asked politely.

“If God wants something done, he will do it,” She said with a smug righteousness.

J.R. buried his fork in his napkin, which was translation for, “Lord, don’t let me kill this lady.” We think a lot alike.

I leaned forward, “If we all adopted that way of thinking then the Bible becomes a moot point.” She smiled. I just about vomited all over the table. Moments like those suck. The “born again lazy” have no idea they are even lazy. The church grows this attitude by never confronting her crazy rhetoric. She truly thinks it’s okay to let God have the bulk of the responsibility. After all: he’s God. Never mind the countless opportunities He will hand you in your lifetime to help those around you. Why bother if He can do anything He wants?

Many Christians see the world as a mission field, but the sad truth is that many of us never leave the driveway of the church to do anything about it. Our pastor’s wife may never get it. Does that mean she’s going to hell, or that God doesn’t love her? I don’t know. I know “narrow is the gate.”

### **HONESTLY DOING**

Christ sought out people. He picked them up, healed them, loved them, laughed with them, went to their depths and pulled them out, then died for them. Christ paid for humanity with his life. Don’t let His sacrifice go another day in your life without you pulling someone up out of his or her sin and asking if you can help. Because the truth is, you can. Proverbs 28 is filled with reminders for approaching sin in your life as well as the lives of others:

*Verse 13 says, “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” Fast forward to verse 23: “He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue.”*

Honestly what are you doing? Are you and your church focused on destroying sin, or are you more concerned about its appearance?

J.R. and I have this thing about honesty. We believe the biggest problem with Christians isn’t about filling the pews or worrying about the next big series campaign. Honesty—that’s the church’s number one struggle. From the tender of the flock to the flock itself, we couldn’t tell the truth to save our souls. The church

has convinced itself that truth is a commodity of salvation and not the author of it. We are so busy building a process for honest conversations that we have lost the ability to stand up and say, "I've got a problem with sin!" We have stifled confession to preserve embarrassment.

We have taken pride to new levels, and along the climb decided anyone with a sin problem is better left to fend for himself or herself. Funny, as I write this I can hear the critics saying that we are misguided and disillusioned. The problem is, confession comes very slow to the American Church. We are only honest when we get caught, when our marriage is suddenly on the rocks, when our kids are in trouble, when our career takes a turn, when we just can't go on.

We are so consumed with hiding from our honesty we have decided it's okay to ignore it. As a result we leave the sin lying in the aisles, hoping the janitor will sweep it away as we close the doors to the public, plug our ears, close our eyes, and hope God somehow sorts it all out.

While we are doing our best to ignore sin, throughout the week our neighbors are peering into our lives scoffing at the Sunday morning hypocrites who live across the street or down the block. Why should they follow our example when we are ignoring Christ in our own lives?

The honesty problem is exhausting. Hiding in Christian self-righteousness while leading others to live comfortable lives as "born again lazy." We have stopped following Christ as Savior and positioned Him as a happy, feel-good philosopher that works on Sundays, but that doesn't bother us during the week while I live my lazy lifestyle. The problem here is that Christ doesn't offer deals for salvation. It is what it is. Christ died for you. He died a horrible death on a cross so you can have salvation. This ain't about your dreams, plans, or designs--this is about what he did for you. Honesty has been replaced by our need for fulfilled dreams, passions, and minute-to-minute wants.

Paul was completely honest in Romans 7. It's almost too painful to read as he lays out his life. The church seems to miss this chapter, and J.R. and I do too, at times. But man do we get it, because we are so much like Paul: human and born of sin.

#### ROMANS 7:14-20

*"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no*

*longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."*

It is Paul's candor, his honesty, that frees him from sin. God only knows what Paul was up to. I know what we are capable of doing. The sky's the limit on the amount of pain and confusion we can create in our lives and the lives of others.

The one thing that will always land us on our knees is honesty. It usually happens when we are out of excuses, out of promises, out of outs. We quickly hit the floor and scream out in pain for God to help us as we admit the sin in our lives. He will answer those prayers. But His word is also clear that we need to admit our sin to each other. This is where we will find the freedom from our sin, not in a dark room filled with those screaming, isolated, honest moments of prayer.

JAMES 5:13-15

*"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."*

We can't miss this. Honesty is part of the prayer equation. Honesty among each other is vital to healing.

Should you decide to follow Christ, you're looking at blood, sweat, and tears. Peace and happiness are by-products, but you have to work it. Simon Peter was told to back off as Christ rebuked him for messing with Christ's eternal mission. It must have sucked. Imagine your Lord and Savior in your grill saying, "Get behind me, Satan!" God's Son calling you out? It must have been one of the worst moments in Simon Peter's life. But the rebuke offered Peter the truth he needed. Jesus didn't sit him down, call five people, start a recovery group, put up a website with an 800 number...no, he simply applied the truth directly to Peter's life. Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Peter probably stood and stared at Jesus. Can you imagine what a failure he must have thought he was? I would have died right there. I think Peter most likely did. Jesus goes on to say, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. I tell*

*you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." (Mark 8:34-38)*

God is saying the same thing to the church today. Get your head wrapped around me and not around your own fame. Take your face off the posters, the CDs, the DVDs, the books, and marketing collateral. Get a hold of yourselves. Stop with the all-inclusive meetings with pastors, stop building the perfect leader and give me your attention. Fall flat. Admit your sin as a church, one to another. Tend, not talk.

---