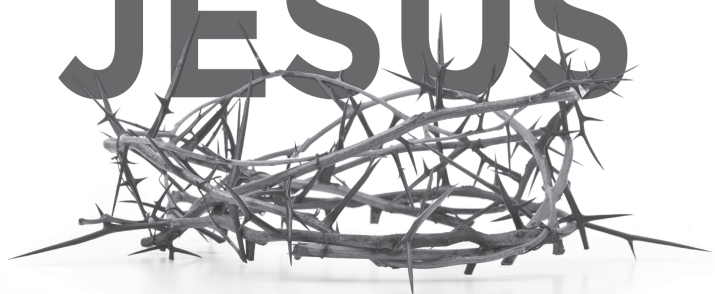


REPRESENT
JESUS



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INTRODUCTION

HAVE YOU EVER been misrepresented? Strictly speaking, have your words ever been taken out of context, your activities misunderstood, or your associations judged? If so, you will probably concur that it can be a very frustrating experience. Although we are aware we cannot control other people's perceptions of us, we would like for their opinions to be based on who we really are and what we really say. Most of us are not expecting to be represented perfectly, but we do desire to be represented properly. When we aren't, it can be extremely upsetting.

If being misrepresented is upsetting for us, I can only imagine what it feels like to God. Unfortunately God has to deal with it much more than we do. As a matter of fact, those who claim to know Him best often misrepresent Him most.

ARE WE LIKE JESUS?

I came across a recent survey commissioned by the Fermi Project and conducted by the Barna Group that corroborates this claim. One aspect of the survey researched the top words non-Christians use to describe Christians. The most used descriptors were such words as *judgmental*, *insensitive*, *homophobic*, and *hypocritical*.¹

My concern with this data is not that Christians are unpopular; I am aware surveys can be highly skewed and that the goal of our faith is not to win a popularity contest. Rather, my issue with this data is that many of the words used to describe Christians do not describe Jesus.

It suggests that in many instances, Christians are not like Christ. It's like the quote Gandhi is credited with saying: "I like your Christ but I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."²

This is a huge problem and a mirror that reveals a much larger issue: Christians have greatly misunderstood what it means to be one. The governing assumption seems to be that a Christian is one who has received Jesus instead of one who follows Him. In other words, the word *Christian* is understood to mean a person who *likes Jesus* as opposed to one who is *like Jesus*. And if this is our understanding of Christianity, then it will inevitably affect our understanding of spiritual growth.

I know this from personal experience. Earlier in my life I associated the terms *spiritual growth* and *godliness* with morality and spiritual disciplines. I erroneously assumed that if my behavior was moral and I engaged in spiritual disciplines, that would lead to spiritual growth. I assumed if I was praying, studying Scripture, and living morally, I was growing. As a result, I spent a large part of my spiritual journey pursuing the equivalent of spiritual face-lifts when what I actually needed was a heart transplant. I was converted, pious, moral, and disciplined, but I completely misunderstood what it means to grow spiritually.

But then some time ago, as I was studying the Scriptures, I began to see an interesting and recurring theme that radically altered my perspective. I noticed passages such as these:

For those God foreknew he also predestined *to be conformed to the image of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

—ROMANS 8:29, EMPHASIS ADDED

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth *until Christ is formed in you*.

—GALATIANS 4:19, EMPHASIS ADDED

After encountering several passages similar to these, I had an epiphany. Spiritual growth isn't necessarily about doing more; it's about becoming more like Jesus!

Prayer is important, but God's ultimate goal is not to get us to pray more. Morality is essential, but God's ultimate goal is not just to get us to do more moral things. God's priority is to make us like Jesus. Godliness and spiritual growth can really be described in one Word: *Jesus*. In other words, Jesus is more than a savior; He is an example. He is the ultimate expression of what it means to live a godly life.

This perspective rocked my spiritual world. I realized I needed to become like Christ. However, being a pragmatist, I could not stop there. I had to ask myself the question, "What is Jesus Christ like?" Amazingly and disturbingly I could only provide generic, nonspecific answers. I was the pastor of a large congregation, had Ivy League seminary training, and had been a Christian as long as I could remember, but I didn't really know what Jesus was like. I had read, heard, and preached about His resurrection, His miracles, His blood, His sacrifice, and His ministry, but I didn't know much about His character.

I realized there was an image of Jesus in my mind that was possibly inconsistent with the image of Jesus in the

Scriptures. Therefore, I needed to be *re-presented* with the Jesus of the Scriptures so that I could properly represent *that* Jesus in my life. That led me on a journey to study the Gospels and learn as much as I could about the character of Christ so I could ask the Holy Spirit to cultivate those traits in my character.

This book contains what I discovered on my journey. It is my attempt to capture twelve core aspects of who Jesus is and re-present them to you, so that you too can experience the life change that comes from living like Jesus lived. First of all, we will explore Jesus's chief character trait, which is love. When I say love, trust me, it is not what you may think! This chapter will clarify what Jesus actually means when He instructs us to love others, including our enemies.

You may be surprised to discover that Jesus isn't giving us instruction on how to feel but rather challenging us to expand our understanding of love beyond simple affection to how we treat others. In other words, this chapter teaches that biblical love isn't simply about affection; it's about activity. When Jesus instructs us to love others, He isn't simply concerned with how we feel about them but rather how we treat them. Jesus isn't saying feel something; He is saying do something.

Next, in chapter 2 we will address the importance and significance of truth. Jesus modeled a life of truth and communicated that it sets us free. It's one thing to tell the truth; it is another thing to live in it. In this chapter we will learn how to experience freedom from facades and live truthfully, authentically, and freely. An associate of mine often says, "Be real, because being fake is exhausting." Agreed! After we address the significance of

truth, this chapter will also coach you on how to share some “hard truths” with others. Jesus had to have some hard conversations. So will we.

In chapter 3 we will discover how Jesus is the epitome and embodiment of grace. Grace is a challenging subject. We all love to receive it but struggle to give it. This chapter will expand our understanding of how Jesus sees grace, and consequently may reveal that we aren’t as grace-full as we may think. However, we do reap what we sow. Therefore we should learn to walk with grace because one day we may fall and be in need of it.

Chapter 4 is one of my favorites. It focuses on wisdom. As a pastor, I am exposed to a plethora of words that people use to describe Jesus. Unfortunately *wise* is rarely one of them. However, Luke 2:52 clearly claims that Jesus grew in wisdom, and if we were to examine His activity with individuals throughout the Gospels, it would corroborate that claim. Jesus wasn’t just righteous; He was also wise. Consequently, if we are going to follow in His footsteps we must grasp that godliness isn’t just living morally; it is also living wisely. This chapter will help you do that. Others benefit from your gifts; you benefit from your wisdom. When wisdom isn’t emphasized we end up being good people but not wise ones, and in order to properly represent Jesus we need both.

Chapter 5 is another one of my favorites (I have a lot of favorites). It is titled “Jesus and the S-Word.” It’s about . . . well, you just have to read that one.

In Chapter 6 we examine how Jesus’s life was the ultimate expression of generosity. This chapter will teach us the importance of modeling generosity. It will teach how generosity is one of the ways we can avoid unintentional

idolatry and ensure that Jesus is Lord of all. This chapter acknowledges the reality of the rise of gimmicks when it comes to giving in contemporary Christianity. However, it has been said that we don't correct wrong teaching with nonteaching; we correct wrong teaching with right teaching. This chapter reminds us of what generosity looks like when it is done the "Jesus way."

Chapter 7 is probably one of the most important chapters in the book. It re-presents the nature and importance of spiritual disciplines. In this chapter I contend that what exercise is to an athlete, spiritual discipline is to the Christian. There is no way we can do what Jesus did in public without doing what Jesus did in private. You don't end up like Jesus by accident. This chapter exposes what some of Jesus's disciplines were and gives us encouragement and instruction on how to implement them in our own lives.

Chapter 8 re-presents to us the way Jesus managed relationships. Your greatest pleasure and pain will often come from the same place: your relationships. However, Jesus provided an amazing and effective model for managing them, and this chapter exposes it and instructs us on how to follow it. Jesus had a "place" for everyone in His life. He never apologized for not giving someone a place in His life. He was not comfortable with them being in. This chapter will help you learn how to put people in their place.

Chapter 9 explores one of Jesus's most effective tools: His words. Jesus was constantly confronted with cynics and critics who would attempt to trap Him. However, He avoided unnecessary inconvenience in His life because He used His words wisely and responsibly. His words not

only benefited Him; they also benefited others. Grace, love, and hope were often transported into people's lives through the vehicle of words. This chapter will equip you with the insight you need to emulate Jesus in this area so that your words bless your life and the lives of others.

Chapter 10 is one of the most challenging and rewarding chapters in the book. This chapter is titled "Jesus and Forgiveness." Forgiveness is one of the most important concepts in Christianity. Our faith rests in the reality that we have experienced forgiveness. However, in my experience I have discovered it is one of the subjects about which people are the most confused. This subject is too essential for anyone to be unclear. In this chapter we clearly and simply explain what forgiveness is, what it isn't, how Jesus modeled it, and how we can practice it. This chapter will help release you from the paralyzing pain of the past and push you into the next chapter of God's story for your life.

Chapter 11 addresses another essential yet confusing topic—the subject of faith. In this chapter you will learn how Jesus views faith and consequently how we should view it. You will discover that faith doesn't alter the will of God; it accomplishes it. It is not a leash that we can wrap around God's neck to lead Him to our will. Rather, faith is what God uses to lead us into His will. This chapter will explore what faith is. Faith is not optimism; it produces optimism, but it shouldn't be confused with or limited to optimism. Also, this chapter will offer biblical and proven insight on how to grow your faith. Growing our faith isn't always about our faith getting bigger. Jesus said that we could move mountains with faith the size

of mustard seeds. Growing our faith is about our faith getting broader.

Finally, chapter 12 addresses the X factor that empowers us to become like Jesus—the Holy Spirit. In this chapter you will learn that Jesus lived a life of complete reliance on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus had to rely on the Holy Spirit to be Jesus then it goes without saying that we have to rely on Him as well to be like Jesus. Together, we explore the biblical truth that the Holy Spirit is not *something* but rather He is *someone*, and this Someone wants to help us become like *the* One, Jesus Christ.

I'm going to level with you: this material changed my life. It released me from the spiritual hamster wheel and escorted me into the experience of joy, peace, and fulfillment I had previously read about in the Scriptures but until recently had never experienced for myself.

I want that kind of experience for you. And it's not just me who wants it—God wants it for you too. He wants to unlock, unearth, and unleash the potential inside you, but here's the reality: it only comes through intentional Christlike growth. I pray this book serves as a map that directs you to the next level in your spiritual life: becoming more like Jesus.

So, are you ready to learn about Jesus all over again? Get ready to represent! Get ready...set...*grow!*