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(New Series 09/04/13)

## THE RADICAL EXPERIMENT ONE YEAR TO A LIFE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

(Luke 9:57-62)

### THE RADICAL EXPERIMENT ONE YEAR TO A LIFE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

**Ex• per• i• ment n.:** a course of action taken under controlled conditions in order to test a claim.

Throughout this book we have explored a variety of bold claims about our purpose in life that are contained in the gospel yet contradicted by the American dream. Claims such as these: Real success is found in radical sacrifice. Ultimate satisfaction is found not in making much of ourselves but in making much of God. The purpose of our lives transcends the country and culture in which we live. Meaning is found in community, not individualism; joy is found in generosity, not materialism; and truth is found in Christ, not universalism. Ultimately, Jesus is a reward worth risking everything to know, experience, and enjoy.

But claims such as these remain theories until they are tested. That is the reason for the experiment. As you test a claim, you discover either its futility or its reality. And once you discover a claim's reality, then you're more likely to adjust your perspective, rearrange your thoughts, and alter your life around that truth. It will turn your life upside down— or, really, right side up. So I challenge you to an experiment. I dare you to test the claims contained in the gospel, maybe in a way you have never done before. I invite you to see if radical obedience to the commands of Christ is more meaningful, more fulfilling, and more gratifying than the American dream. And I guarantee that if you complete this experiment, you will possess an insatiable desire to spend the rest of your life in radical abandonment to Christ for his glory in all the world.

We'll call it the Radical Experiment.

### ONE YEAR

The experiment is for one year. Now, I realize that such a time line does not coincide with conventional wisdom. Contemporary church-growth philosophers tell me in magazines, articles, fliers, and gimmicks that to be effective, we must organize everything we do in no more than six-or eight-week segments. Churchgoers today want short-term commitments with long-term benefits.

I am thankful Christian history has not always operated on this philosophy. **David Brainerd (1718– 47)** spent years suffering through loneliness, depression, and pain before he saw God bring revival among Native Americans in the Northeast.

**William Carey (1761– 1834)** stayed committed to preaching the gospel for seven years before he saw one person saved in India. **John Hyde (1865– 1912)** wore his body down through long nights of prayer and fasting in order to see people come to Christ in one of the hardest mission fields in the world, the Punjab. The examples of Brainerd, Carey and Hyde should inspire us to ask, **“What if long-term benefits are actually reserved for long-term commitments?”**

Even the world believes this. Why else would graduating high school seniors commit, at a minimum, four years and thousands of dollars to further their education? Why else would law and medical students suffer through tireless work and grueling schedules? Why else would musicians practice their instruments day after day, or why else would athletes train year after year for a sport? People make long-term commitments all the time out of a desire for long-term benefit. I bet you have made more than one long-term commitment that you look back on with satisfaction.

So my challenge to you is to use one year of your life to radically alter the remainder of your life. I believe it is important, though, to keep the focus on one year, because there are some things you can do for a year that you may not be able to sustain for multiple years. And there are some things you can postpone for one year that you may not be able to postpone for longer. So the challenge here is not forever.

The challenge is for one year, and it involves **five components**. I dare you over the next year to...

- 1. pray for the entire world;**
- 2. read through the entire Word;**
- 3. sacrifice your money for a specific purpose;**
- 4. spend your time in another context;**
- 5. commit your life to a multiplying community.**

I believe— no, I know— that if you stick to these challenges for a whole year, you will find yourself coming alive like never before. You will know the incomparable thrill of being a part of what God is up to where you live and around the world. You will be ready to shed forever the unworthy parts of the American dream and hold on to the beautiful and lasting dream that God has designed for you.

Let's get to those **five components** that will take you there.

## **1. PRAY FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD**

I realize that at first this may sound general, vague, ambiguous, even a bit out of reach. You may be thinking, Can I as an individual really pray specifically and effectively for the entire world? Let me show you what I mean and why it's so important.

In a world where more than 4.5 billion people are without Christ and more than a billion are on the edge of starvation, we have to begin somewhere. So where? Jesus answers that question for us. In [Matthew 9:36-38](#) we see him surrounded by the multitudes and moved with compassion because they were **“harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”** So he turned to his disciples and said, **“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”**

Do these words surprise you? They do me... for two reasons. First, in light of all the sick, poor, and needy around Jesus, I would have expected him to immediately start giving marching orders to his disciples. “Peter, you go to that person. John, you care for that guy. Andrew, you help her over there.” But that’s not what he said. Yes, as we see in [Matthew 10](#), he gave them the instructions that we looked at in the last chapter. But before he told them to do anything else, Jesus told them to pray.

What is even more surprising, though, is what Jesus told them to pray for. I would have expected Jesus to say, “You guys see the need. The harvest is plentiful. So pray for these people who are harassed and helpless. Pray for them.” But that isn’t what he said. Jesus didn’t say to pray for those who were lost. Instead he told the disciples to pray for the church.

Why do you think Jesus would look at the crowds around him, with all their deep needs, and then turn to his disciples and tell them to pray for themselves? The answer is humbling. When Jesus looked at the harassed and helpless multitudes, apparently his concern was not that the lost would not come to the Father. Instead his concern was that his followers would not go to the lost.

Now think about it. What happens when you and I take these words from Jesus and put them in a world where more than a billion people have still not heard the gospel? A fundamental reality snaps into focus: we are not praying. This is the only possible explanation for how there can be such great need yet so few workers. The multitudes are waiting to hear, and our most urgent need is to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out Christians into the harvest field.

This is the step that you and I are most likely to overlook and yet the one that is most dangerous for us to ignore. In the gospel we have seen the depth of our inadequacy and the extent of our inability to accomplish anything of eternal value apart from the power of God. We are a planning, strategizing, implementing people, yet radical obedience to Christ requires that we be a praying people.