

# GIVING IT AWAY

INVITING OTHERS TO FIND  
MEANING IN GOD'S FAMILY



Danny Franks



*introduction*

# Giving it Away

Inviting Others to Find Meaning  
in God's Family

**L**et's face it. We approach church as we do all of life: *What's in it for me?* Author Danny Franks says that's normal. After all, we're born consumers.

But is that *wrong*?

*No*, says Franks, and he reminds us that desire is not evil. But he also notes that our desires "point to something deeper." We're missing something, and we know it.

By asking what the church can do for us, we treat church like a club membership, and we miss

the mission God has given us. Our interaction with the church—and with God—becomes transactional. We find that by taking, we lose. But by giving, we gain.

When we stop viewing ourselves as club members and learn to see ourselves as members of God's family, our mindset changes and our mission gains proper focus.

God is inviting people into His family. As we serve that mission, we start living the way God intended. Real contentment and satisfaction come when we find our place in the family of God.

*Our Daily Bread Ministries*

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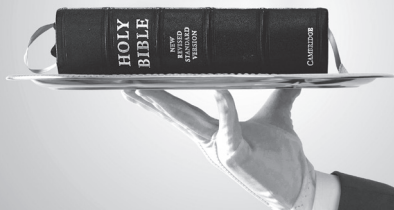
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*one*

## Consumerism: The Double-Edged Sword

**A** few years ago my wife and I celebrated two decades of marriage. During that twentieth year of our wedded bliss, we had two experiences that stirred a Saint Francis of Assisi-style angst within my soul.

You remember Saint Francis, don't you? He was the 13th-century friar who was raised as the rich son of a successful merchant. An epiphany in his early 20s led him to forsake all his worldly wealth and align himself with the poor beggars of Italy. He canceled his Netflix subscription, went on a strict ramen noodle diet, and scrounged for sofas in the Goodwill dumpster. For all practical purposes, he was history's first college student.

But I digress. My experience had nothing to do

with dumpster diving. Quite the contrary, for a brief moment in time we were living in the lap of luxury. For a couple of years leading up to our 20th anniversary I had been saving for a tropical getaway. We're talking sea, sand, and Shirley Temples with little paper umbrellas for flair. But for Christmas that year, my in-laws announced they were taking the whole family on a cruise in the spring, just a month prior to our anniversary trip. So if you're keeping score at home, that's a week on a cruise ship, followed by another week at an all-inclusive resort in the Caribbean, all within a month. A kid could get used to that.

Except that this particular kid never quite got used to it. Don't get me wrong; I loved the experience. Valets took our bags and carried them to our room. Waitstaff were at our table every meal, making sure that all of our gastronomical desires were indulged. On the beach, an entire team ensured that our lounge chairs were adjusted to perfection and our beverages never ran dry. When we returned to our room, the pillows had been fluffed, the bed made, the towels transformed into fabric origami creations.

It should have been the travel season of a lifetime. And in some ways it was. But those back-to-back experiences led to my own Saint Francis epiphany: *it just felt wrong.*

Maybe you've been there. Perhaps you've been the wealthy vacationer who depends on the daily wage-earner to wait on you hand and foot. Maybe you've traveled to your gated, exclusive, pampered

community as you pass mile after mile of shantytowns and poverty. And somewhere deep in your seemingly rich soul, you just feel...well...*wrong*.

And it's not just about lavish vacations and large savings accounts. We see the insidious creep of our desires in every area of our lives. Whether it's going out to a restaurant instead of cooking (and saving money) at home, buying a fancy coffee drink at the corner shop, or just wanting to relax at home and watch television, we recognize that we always want our personal comfort to win out. Our desires are subtle and deeply rooted, but like the pampering at an exotic location, they can sometimes feel wrong.

That's the cut of consumerism. The experiences we save for and strive for always leave us wanting more. Eventually they leave us empty. And if we're paying attention, they leave us feeling a bit guilty about all that we have compared to what others do not have. Even if we don't spend money on large-ticket items such as a vacation, the chances are that most of us—when compared to the rest of the world—are considered incredibly rich. A recent World Bank study showed that if you make \$5,000 or more per year, you are in top 20% of wage-earners on the planet. Earn \$12,000 per year and you just broke the top 10%. No matter how lavish or modest our dwellings, vehicles, and possessions, we are by all accounts very wealthy indeed.

But what happens when we shift the me-centric, get-more, do-more consumer attitude to the spiritual realm? What is the cost when we apply our beachside

buffet, whatever-you-want mindsets to the local church?

I would guess that our immediate reaction might be one of revulsion. I'm assuming that we would agree the church is no place for consumers. I'll bet that when most of us envision a faith community, we picture one that lives selflessly and sacrifices in order to serve the helpless, not the other way around.

But before we make a Saint Francis-sized jump, let's acknowledge the obvious facts: the consumer who loves the perks of a Caribbean cruise is the same consumer who makes certain decisions when picking a pew. Perhaps you have a range of churches to choose from and can identify with what I'm talking about. We all naturally gravitate to places that make life more convenient for us. Whether it's ease-of-use on a church website, convenient parking close to the building, ministries that meet our needs and stage of life, or even good coffee at the lobby cafe, we are drawn to places that give us a great experience.

Or perhaps some of us have lived on the flip side of that coin. We consider ourselves invested in our local church but are disappointed in the caliber of people who seem to be coming through the doors. We see consumers flit in and flame out week after week, seeking sparkle rather than substance. And it's frustrating, because we know there is more to life than turning a relationship with God into a transaction.

Mark Waltz<sup>■</sup> has written extensively about the curse of consumerism and the local church. In his book *First Impressions*, he says:



*In the end, an appropriate approach to consumerism is to see not consumers, but people—people who matter to God. The motivation to make [an] impression is not to better everyone else in town. It's not about stroking our egos, pleased with how excellent we are. . . . Impressions matter because people matter. What they think matters. What they believe matters. What they want matters. What they need matters.*

*When our guests know they matter, we've connected with them on a human level. It's really the only place to connect. It's where Jesus connects with us.<sup>1</sup>*

▶ **Mark Waltz** has also written a book called *Lasting Impressions*, in which he stresses the importance of people knowing that we truly care.

I'm afraid we live in the in-between spaces that span what we *want* versus what we know is *right*. That's true in much of life, but it seems worse when it comes to our church experience. A church that “meets our needs” is important because we want to grow spiritually. To grow spiritually we need to be disciplined. Discipleship needs intentionality. Intentionality requires that a church has a plan, and if we are looking for a church that has a plan we end up feeling like shoppers rather than pilgrims.

But is that always a bad thing? Didn't Jesus intend His followers to grow spiritually? When He commissioned His apostles at His ascension,▶ He told them to make disciples and baptize and teach...

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Waltz, *First Impressions: Creating Wow Experiences in Your Church*. (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2005).

all of which would involve some semblance of a plan. Could it be true that—two thousand years later—we as followers of Jesus have simply refined the plan and contextualized for our local communities?

▶ The **ascension** of Christ occurred 40 days after Jesus's resurrection. As the disciples watched, Jesus ascended upward from the Mount of Olives until He was obscured by a cloud. Descriptions of the ascension occur briefly in Mark 16:19, Luke 24:50–51, and in Acts 1:9–11.

Maybe. Or maybe not. It *could* be that we have adopted a “whatever it takes” attitude in order to reach more people. Or perhaps our contextualization is a cover-up for our comfort. It's possible that our bells and whistles have become smoke and mirrors.

This may not be a current issue for you. Maybe you are blessed to be in a church that meets your needs and affords opportunity for community and service. But whether or not *you're* looking for a church, there are people in your neighborhood who are. As a participant in church life, you may be one who has to help others answer the “What's in it for me?” question.

The ideas generated in this booklet will at times be a tricky conversation, rife with landmines on the road to agreement. But the conversation is important for the sake of those still on the outside. It's important for those of us desperately searching for community yet feeling like a consumer. It's one that hopefully will show us a new way forward.



*two*

## **We Have Met the Enemy (and He Is Us)**

...**O**r so said famed cartoonist Walt Kelly, creator of the “Pogo” comic strip of the mid-twentieth century. Kelly’s subtle jab was aimed at the paradox of the human condition: those things we hate, we tend to embody. That which we stand against, we sometimes stand on. All of us are hard-wired toward comfort. Given a difficult road and an easy path, we’ll take the path just about every time.

And it's no different when it comes to choosing a church. While it's easy to question the motivation of churches that add cafes and parking shuttles to attract newcomers, it's also far too simple to get swept up in the comfort those experiences provide. We can flip the coin from "I dislike that" to "I deserve that" quicker than we can say drive-thru communion.

Remember the Pixar movie *Wall-E*? Perhaps a quick recap is in order. The story centers around a lovable, full-of-personality robot who is the only remaining inhabitant of earth. Wall-E the robot is one of the thousands of products manufactured by Buy n Large, a global conglomerate that cornered the market of every conceivable industry. When earth's population had consumed all of Buy n Large's inventory, they were left with the resulting mountains of trash. And because the trash was an affront to their comfort, a spaceship called *Axiom* (also a Buy n Large product) whisked them off the planet while our little robot hero batted cleanup. And all the while, future generations were raised on the *Axiom*, allowing the revolving door of consumer culture to care for their every need.

You see? That which we stand against, we sometimes stand *on*.

Before we can blaze a new trail, we have to come to terms with our current one. If we are going to fight against consumerism in the spiritual realm we have to first fight it in the personal realm. And

I believe we do that by humbly acknowledging four truths:

**1. We like stuff.** Before we criticize the consumeristic tendencies of the American church, we have to recognize them as *our* tendencies. In a sense, we created them, because if we are believers, we are the church. And we created them because—no matter how we spin it—we like stuff. Whether it’s good meals, nice cars, exotic destinations, or just a softer pillow, we like to keep comfort front-and-center.

Sometimes I try to identify as a minimalist—someone who eschews mountains of possessions or experiences in favor of a simpler lifestyle. I argue that I’m not a consumer because I consume very little. But consuming doesn’t deal only with the products we’re sold, it also deals with the attitudes we hold. My inner minimalist still gets frustrated because a line was too long, a service experience too poor, the wifi signal too weak, or my food too cold. Busted! I like the stuff that soothes my soul.

**2. We’re wired for desire.** When God created our first parents, He placed Adam and Eve in the garden, gave them the keys to the earth, and commanded them to “subdue it and have dominion.”<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word for subdue is *kabash*, which means

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2 Genesis 1:28

“bring into subjection” and connotes the idea that Adam and Eve were to make the land benefit them. Every grapevine, every running stream, every last herb was a gift from their Creator and meant to be enjoyed.

The problem wasn't that Adam and Eve desired comfort (after all, God commanded them to *kabash*), it was that they began to desire it from the wrong places. Genesis 3 brings a swindling serpent with an empty promise: *You can have more. You can be like the Creator rather than merely enjoying His creation. Instead of loving God, you can be as God. Rather than being a caretaker, you can take care of yourself.*

And we all know how that story ended. Adam and Eve's desire consumed and eventually destroyed them. The labor that brought joy became laborious. And sin, greed, and rampant consumption invaded all of humanity.

**3. Our desires point to something deeper.** Repeat after me: *desire is not bad*. As people created with will and emotions, we are hard-wired for enjoyment. We long for it. But our desires can't be an end unto themselves. They have to point elsewhere.

When I smell freshly-baked cookies, I don't want to just soak up the smell. I want the cookies in my belly. Likewise, the aroma of our desires alerts us there is something more. It's easy to view salaries and luxuries as gods rather than gifts from God. Likewise, it's almost second nature for

us to want what God gives us rather than wanting God Himself.

We will never be satisfied with what we consume. That's the point of consumption. Once we consume it, it's gone. The steak runs out. The good memories fade. The experience grows dull. But when we view creation as a neon sign that points us back to our Creator, that's where we can find sanity.

**4. Contentment is found in Christ.** Philippians 4<sup>3</sup> is a wealth of material regarding...well, wealth and materialism. In it, Paul talks about worry (an emotion often directly tied to our stuff), patience, abundance, need, generosity, and blessing. But the linchpin of the chapter is found in verses 11 and 13, where he says “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances...I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”<sup>3</sup>

3 Paul wrote his letter to the **Philippians** while he was a prisoner, yet its message overflows with irrepressible joy. This is due to the fact that Paul found his contentment not in material things but in his relationship with Jesus. He knew Christ is with us in the midst of our problems.

Until we recognize that Jesus is before all things, and in Him all things hold together, and by Him all things were created, we will never

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3 Philippians 4:11,13 (NIV)

recognize His supremacy.<sup>4</sup> And because of that, we will never recognize our dependency—not on stuff but on a Savior.

As followers of Jesus, we must lead the way in declaring our dependency on Him. He is enough for our souls. He is enough for our churches. Until we can find complete contentment in Him, we will never find satisfaction in anything that we own or experience.

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4 Colossians 1:16–18





*three*

## Killing the Country Club

**A** few years ago my family and I were shopping for a larger house. As six people living in a three bedroom, things were getting a little crowded. And so we began the quest for the perfect place in the perfect neighborhood at a perfect price.

I'll spare you the details of the journey—foreclosures that looked like they were the scene of several homicides, “fixer uppers” that would have taken several lifetimes and a king’s ransom to renovate, and fantastic deals that fell through at the last minute. When the search was over, we ended up

in a relatively quiet little neighborhood with “country club” in the name.

There was just one problem. There was no country club in the neighborhood. Oh, there’s a country club a short drive down the road, complete with a private restaurant, tennis courts, an Olympic-sized pool, and a fancy golf course (which I define as one without a neon-colored windmill or fiberglass dinosaur). But it’s not *our* country club. It doesn’t land in our borders. We can observe the country club crowd going and coming, but we can’t be a part of that crowd. While we have the name, we have none of the benefits.

Our churches have a similar, yet inverse, problem. We don’t have the country club name, but we often have the country club perks. Membership status? We can do that. Programs that scratch where we itch? Sure. Recreational facilities? On-site childcare? Convenient parking? Check. Check. And check. Shoot, some churches will even wheel us around in a golf cart when we get tired of walking.

Here’s the problem with a country club. It is by its very nature exclusive. We have to pay to access the facility. High membership fees and numerous add-on costs keep the in-crowd in and the undesirables out. Buying our way into a country club gives us the illusion of friendship, meaning, status, and purpose, but it leaves riff-raff like me on the outside looking in, wondering what it’s like to be inside the walls.

Jesus never called the church to be a country club. In fact, He commissioned His disciples to go into all

the world and bring people in. Did you catch that? Rather than keeping outside people out, Jesus sent inside people out to bring outside people in.

And the reason is simple. *We were once outside people.* For believers, there was a time that we were on the outside. I was once alienated from Jesus, separated because of my sin and isolated because of my hostility.<sup>5</sup> But the grace of God and the crucifixion of Jesus made it possible for me to be brought from the outside to the inside. While I was formerly a rebel against the kingdom, I am now a son at the table. And just as I've been reconciled, I now have been given that same ministry of reconciliation.<sup>6</sup>

This booklet has been dealing with the consumer culture of the modern church. In one sense, I think that culture is unavoidable. We're all consumers, after all. Similarly, I don't think consumerism is the unforgivable sin. I believe it is a discipleship issue; an unbelief that is constantly being expelled from our lives, just like anything else.

You may be wondering how consumerism equates to unbelief, and that's a fair question. When we live for possessions or experiences, we tend to place value on those things that can never satisfy. We turn away from Jesus—the one in whom we should find sufficiency—and we turn towards lesser gods. But as we discovered earlier, the remedy for consumerism is recognizing

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5 Colossians 1:21–22

6 2 Corinthians 5:18

that all of our desires point to something deeper, and all of our contentment must be found in Christ. When we turn that corner, everything changes. Church is no longer just about us and getting our needs met. It is not about simply finding areas of comfort that meets our felt needs. It is not about insulating ourselves from the outside world. Part of the Christian experience—especially as it pertains to the local church—is about loving those whom Jesus loves and reaching those He’s called us to reach. I believe that consumers can be changed into missionaries by recognizing how much we possess, and how it all comes from the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

The church is not a club of consumers, but a community of Christ followers. It is a body of believers—all admittedly at different stages in their journey—traveling deeper into the life-changing power of the gospel. When we swap our labels from “club member” to “family member” it changes our mindset and focuses our mission.

Family members care for one another and live in deference to one another. Ideally, if you are a part of my family, I am going to put your needs ahead of my own. I am going to try to outdo you in showing honor.<sup>8</sup> I am going to do everything I can to make sure that you feel loved, included, and cared for. That’s what families do, and it’s how the strongest families thrive.

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7 Ephesians 2:1–10

8 Romans 12:10

In a similar way, family members try to include those on the outside. I was fortunate enough to grow up in a family with very hospitable parents. Our home was always open to friends, neighbors, and strangers who were seeking friendship, a good meal, or a warm bed. Even today—in his mid-70s—my dad makes sure there is always a spare seat or a spare room in his home for someone who needs it.

If the church is family, we will be family to those who need family. If we understand the gospel, we will live out the gospel. And the gospel mandates that we “go and tell” others the good news of Jesus. Here’s the beautiful thing about family-style hospitality: it has a tendency to choke out consumerism. When someone shows us true hospitality, it is no longer transactional (i.e., what they can do for us). It’s suddenly relational. We are more impressed with who they are than by what they give.

Jesus reminds us of this in Luke 14. In his parable of the banquet, he said, “Do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you”.<sup>9</sup>

Does that describe our churches? Better question: does that describe our lives? Are we living a lifestyle that is more centered around what we *get*, or by what

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9 Luke 14:12–14

we *give*? Do people know us as relationally generous people, always pouring into them and showing grace to them, or do they see us as more of a relational leech, sucking the life out of everyone near?

When we are a part of a church, we begin to discover who we are. And once we know who we are, we will start to know who we must reach. It's in those moments of looking outward rather than inward when we emerge from being a consumer. The "weekend experience" becomes less about what makes us comfortable and more about what makes others comfortable. When we are reaching others with the gospel, leaving a place at the table for those on the outside, and being radically generous with our hospitality, that's when we'll begin to see the country club crumble and a new community arise.



*four*

## Don't Miss the Mission

**S**ychar.

It was a tiny, dusty, sleepy town, basically a wide spot in the road and a microscopic dot on the map. It could have been a stopping-off place on the way to other places, but most people didn't. The Jews avoided Sychar like the plague, because Sychar was in Samaria and Samaria was full of Samaritans. They were the "others," the "half-breeds" who were not fully Jew and not fully Gentile, but fully hated by both. Sychar was a good place for a Samaritan to hide and avoid the outside world.

Until Jesus came.

Jesus could have bypassed Sychar. Most people did. He could have put off His rest stop. Most people would have. But Jesus had a mission—one that involved

Sychar and its most infamous resident. We know her as the Woman at the Well. That's the only way the New Testament identifies her. She likely had other identities given to her by the people of the town: *Adulterer. Homewrecker. Failure. Whore.* But Jesus knew her as more than that: *Beloved. Prized. Cherished. Daughter.*

It is this daughter that Jesus reached out to with great intentionality. When a *pure* Jew spoke to an *impure* Samaritan—no less when a man spoke to a woman—it would have elicited shock and an “Are you talking to me?” moment. And yet, Jesus was more concerned with her soul than with saving face. He did what no one would do to reach one who no one would reach. He spoke kindly to her. He looked into her eyes and asked questions that awakened her heart. He was winsome, persuasive, and real. And He pointed her to something that, once and for all, would satisfy her seemingly unquenchable thirst.

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again” (JOHN 4:13–14).

We travel through Sychar every day. It may not go by that name and it may not resemble that place, but it is Sychar, nonetheless. Avoided by the religious masses, Sychar is the home of those who have been cast down and written off as unlovable, irredeemable, and detestable.

The reason that the religious hate Sychar is because Sychar is filled with “me first” people. They



live life for their own pleasure, looking for meaning and fulfillment in the emptiest of places. They go from experience to experience and dead end to dead end, trying to discover what makes them happy but eventually falling short. They are the ultimate consumer, grabbing and taking and collecting and hoarding, searching for the next thrill.

We see the residents of Sychar in our everyday lives: the pierced-and-tatted loner who spends his days in the coffee shop. The homeless woman who always seems inebriated but still begs for cash at the stoplight near our office. The musclehead who lives at the gym and for himself.

To many of us, this seems sad. We're saddened when we see people who can't put their lives in order. After all, why can't they see where this road leads? What will it take to wake them up? *Why can't they get their life together and be more like me?* It's sad, yes. But not in the way we think. It is not their lifestyle that is most to be pitied, but rather the self-righteous expectations we hold toward people "not like us."

When we view people as impediments to the mission rather than the mission itself, we fail as believers and we fail as the church. When we self-righteously inflate our ego with right living, rather than remember the shame of our past and the ever-near depravity of our hearts, we position ourselves as a people who want nothing to do with the sinners of Samaria.

But it was to sinners that Jesus traveled, and it was when we were sinners that Jesus came to us.

And it's to sinners that He calls us to go.

The focus of this booklet is on consumerism and the church. Our conversation thus far has centered on consumeristic tendencies as they pertain to the weekend experience: "What does this church have for me?" "Which of my needs are being met?" "How comfortable am I made to feel?"

But consumerism has a way of seeping into our weekday lives as well. Long after we leave the confines of a church building, we can feel the crushing weight of comfortable consumerism in the way we choose to engage or ignore those in our lives.

Jesus had that option, by the way: He could have ignored the woman at the well. Society would have seen that as normal. The blistering sun and His parched throat would have made it understandable. He could have adopted a "live and let live" policy, taken a quick breather, and given His mind and feet a rest. But Jesus chose differently. He chose to push past His own convenience so that a shunned outcast could become a loved daughter.

We have that option every day of our lives. Whether it's the co-worker we have trouble relating to or the neighbor who never seems to have a positive word to say, we can choose to love them or reject them. We can allow our precious schedules to drive our priorities, or we can forsake our comfort for the eternity of those who are in our path.

Drawing on the story of the woman at the well, I think we can see four examples of how Jesus entered

into her life, and how we can effectively engage people for the gospel:

**1. Jesus was intentional.** The conversation with the Samaritan woman was not a mistake. Jesus knew exactly what He was doing and kept His objective in view. He saw a woman in pain, and He knew He could bring healing. So despite the risk to His reputation, He pushed ahead with the relationship. Jesus set aside the demands on His time and the crowds who were waiting for Him in order to go after the one.

I'm tempted to look at that meeting with the woman of Sychar as an interruption to Jesus's schedule. No, she was the focus of Jesus's schedule.

*Do we look for those who need to hear the gospel? Are our relationships marked by intentional purpose, or aimless wandering?*

**2. Jesus was relational.** Jesus didn't view her as a project. She was a real person with a real past, real hurts, and real needs. He took time to get to know her as well as her story. He was not in a rush. He didn't force her into His agenda. He didn't nervously mumble a canned speech with memorized transition phrases. Jesus simply chose to speak to a woman that others had forgotten or spurned. He asked questions and sought to make a connection.

*Do we view evangelistic encounters as something we "have to do" or "get to do"? When sharing the gospel, is it about marking a notch on our belt or helping someone to take their next step of faith?*

**3. Jesus exposed the fallacy of her worldview.** Starting with her physical thirst and moving toward emotional and spiritual thirst, Jesus gently pushed into the areas where the woman had placed her identity. He helped her to see that what she longed for would never be fulfilled in the places where she was seeking peace. As Jesus pointed out her idolatry, she was reminded of how every encounter, every attempt at love had left her empty.

*Are we able to gently, yet directly, help people see their self-constructed idols? When we do so, do they feel like we are against them or for them? Are we sufficiently in tune with those around us to identify what those false worldviews are?*

**4. Jesus restored her with the truth of the gospel.** What I love about this story is that Jesus didn't leave the woman as so many others had before Him: still searching, still empty, still broken. No, He pointed her to another reality, the idea that everything she was looking for she could find in Him. He was the one who would never leave her nor forsake her. I imagine that at this point in her life Jesus was the one man who didn't want to use her. Rather, He wanted to bless her. He was the first who didn't base her identity on her works, but His.

*When we point people to hope, are we telling them to do better? Try harder? Be more spiritual? Or are we reminding them of the inability of the human heart to ever be good enough? Are we pointing people to the lasting hope that Jesus offers?*



*five*

## A New Way Forward

**T**his booklet is built on the idea that we are all consumers. We all are looking for experiences that will make us feel better about ourselves and bring comfort to an uncomfortable world. What we must remember is that we will *always* feel uncomfortable, because we were created not for this kingdom, but for another one.

As you have read through this work, you are likely facing one of two temptations: either write off the organized church as a place that creates consumers, or disdain those who we view as consumers. I encourage

you to choose neither of those options. The gospel gives hope for those of us who are selfish and those of us who are cynical. Whether we recognize ourselves as a me-centered consumer, or point the finger at others who make themselves the center of their church orbit, there is hope. There is a better way forward. I propose the following suggestions for redeeming society's selfishness in the light of Jesus:

**1. Look for strongholds of your own comfort.** Where have you made your church experience more about you and less about those who will follow you? How has your choice of a church community been influenced by an over-attention to your own felt needs?

**2. Look out for areas where you can “look out.”** Who are the people whom you can bless today? Where are the places you can engage others with the gospel? What are tangible ways you can serve others? Intentional blessing has a tendency to choke out our selfish ways.

**3. Enlist others in the cause.** Draft an accountability partner to pray with you and for you, to help you see your blind spots, and to work alongside you to serve others.

**4. Apply the richness of the gospel to your heart again, and again, and again.** We overcome our quest for comfort by pursuing the one thing that gives lasting

peace. Spend time each day thanking God for the inheritance you have in Jesus. Allow His Holy Spirit to draw your idolatry into the light of His grace and replace it with those things that truly satisfy.

Our lives are hard-wired for consumerism. We pursue comfort and shun pain or inconvenience. Our hearts may be “idol factories” that constantly seek fulfillment and pleasure apart from God. But the gospel reminds us that we can all experience the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ and find our identity, security, and peace in Him. As the church of Jesus, may we never take His incredible mercy for granted! May we never miss the heart of His mission.



*Our mission is to make the life-changing wisdom of the Bible understandable and accessible to all.*

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