

## Chapter 22 (It's Now)

It's been 5 long years but I love you just the same- Colin James

It has indeed been five long years since I began writing this book. I was frustrated with church over ten years ago. It drove me to write my first book called Energizing Church. Writing these types of books are soul killers and liberators all at the same time. I don't want to write a book that criticizes the church. They have, for the most part, been my friend. Yet, the church, and I, have clashed from time to time. I just can't get past all the church mice games. Honestly, I'm still astounded that the church plays mind games with people. I thought they would be better than that.

I purposely left this chapter blank. Further to this I left the book unfinished three years ago. I just didn't have the spiritual appetite to talk about the church mice. I went through my first book just to see where my head and heart space was at that time. Maybe I was bitter and ranting. Maybe I was just an immature Christian. Yet, as I went through it, chapter by chapter, I couldn't put it down. It was bang on! I still believed that's how to energize church. Either that or I haven't matured as a Christian in ten years. How could I write another book picking on the church? So, I left it unfinished until this year.

What changed for me to begrudgingly write another book on church? It was the broken record. Church after church and pastor after pastor was plainly going the wrong way. The lost? There is no concept of the lost in the modern church. That's just a cute phrase they use now and then to look like they are interested in the great commission. My frustration with the church from day one has been the lost (the world around them). The church says they care. They say they desire to save them all. Yet, actions are far greater than words. The lack of action by the organized church to reach the lost has sickened me to the core. Hence: another book.

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I will stand on my soap box and proclaim this is my last book on the church! Didn't I proclaim that the last time ten years ago? It's been a journey. Since that first book I have been a part of many outreach events. I've a degree in theology. For five months I worked as a pastor. I loved that job. Certainly, I've changed and grown in the last ten years. However, I'm not so sure the church has. To be fair, my current church is doing an amazing job (inhouse) and in the community. Are there warts? Oh yes, there are! Yet, they are human warts. The things all humans and churches suffer from. Even with all the warts they are doing a fantastic job.

I'm fairly certain I'll never say a bad word about church ever again. I say that with a heavy sigh. Will I be in the same place ten years from now? This book has been my journal. A letter to someone I had trouble with. I'm done with it. Certainly, I have said my peace. Now it's time to offer the gospel back to the fallen world. In the beginning of this book, I mentioned that I personally have not been the one to offer the gospel to the lost. As crazy as that seems, I have been tossing out gospel messages in social media for a very long time. Yet, it was impersonal. I kept my distance. I'm not going to keep my distance anymore. I need to practice what I preach. Matthew 28:19 *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*

It's time to take God up on his offer. I have said for long enough that there was no place to send the lost. Church isn't that great. It's still true today. Yet, my church is pretty good. They have been pushing me to serve Him through the church. To worship Him through the church. Let God draw them to wherever he wants them. Maybe, just maybe I should let God decide their walk, their fate. Quite possibly I am maturing finally. So, what to do with church?

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Matthew 23:2-3 *“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.”*

These set of verses above are grinding against me. How on earth can we just listen and serve? Somewhere deep in my soul, I still believe that how modern Christians do church is wrong. Yet, Jesus makes use of a few words. *“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So, you must be careful to do everything they tell you.”* Sometimes the Bible is vague. Many different interpretations of certain passages have plagued Christianity. Was the flood the whole earth or local? Yet, in other moments the Bible is point blank obvious. How much should you forgive: 70 times seven (forever). Here in Matthew 23 Jesus is telling me and you that what the pastor teaches is binding like it was for Moses. Yet, how they act is another matter.

With that said, what do I do with the church? Clearly, I have issues with them. Duh, two books later! In all honestly, it's Gods problem. I don't mean that in a derogatory way towards the good Lord. He will be just fine dealing with bad church. Yet, how can I help steer the church towards the gospel? For years I was having trouble adding to my boy's upbringing. The Ex had her own plans. Then a friend told me to make my ideas her ideas. What it meant is that I would just suggest something and asked her opinion. I never put my name or idea on anything I said. I was amazed how often she would decide within weeks that this idea was good. Why now? It's because I praised her for thinking of it. She put her name on the idea.

I continually get shot down at church. My plan is to throw ten ideas to the wall. Certainly, one would stick. Yet, I make sure my name is never added to what I throw out. It's just stuff I hear. Stuff other churches have done. Having others come up and take credit for your ideas is marvelous. Who cares who, how, or when they get enacted. Instead, rejoice in the Lord when

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they do. I'm finding my ideas are used far more often than I thought. It just needs to be someone else's idea eventually. If you're the black sheep of a group, I say don't rebel. Instead, steer the ship from the back. In essence, be the rudder without them knowing.

I mentioned in a previous chapter that I invited 40 kids to a youth night. The pastors did not appreciate all the attention. What is the right response from a pastor seeking young disciples? The words annoyed, unprepared, excited and ecstatic come to mind. That's what the 40 kids were: excited and ecstatic to be there while being annoying to the youth leaders. Yet, those guys felt the kids were a burden on the plan. Yes, God's plan or their plan? Over time I have shied away from the invitation. If church does not want them then don't invite them. Not anymore! Maybe I should just invite them all. The lost, the kids, the lonely, and the disheveled. I'm going to invite them all to church. I'm going to be annoying has hell.

There is really only one way to change the heart of your church. Be the heart they so desperately need. Oh sure, they will say they don't need a heart transplant. Remember the pastor that told an evangelist "*We don't have a way of evangelizing, but if we get one it won't be your way.*" Remember William Carey wanted to evangelize India. Yet, one church leader rebuked him by saying "*Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me.*". Yet, he went and the Indian nation is forever grateful he did! So many stories of the church saying no. Yet, if God says yes, then do it. The only backing you need is God. With that said, the backing of the body of Christ is better. Oddly enough, the church has always needed a heart transplant from time to time.

Just do it! Be the Nike leader in your church. Be the heart surgeon. Yes, you're a pain. At times you might have to move on. Yet, until God says to go somewhere else, there you are. It's something I have learned over the years. Don't jump churches looking for the right fit. I'm

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convinced without a doubt that God calls us to places we don't want to be. An evangelist named Jim Elliot perished by cannibals in Equator. Right idea but the wrong place, or was it? We have read about people being faithful while losing their life like Cassie Bernall in the Columbine shootings in 1999. What if our faith gave God faith to place us in the right place with the right outcome? Yet, it's the human outcome that bothers us, not the spiritual.

People could say it was the wrong outcome. I struggle over the danger Jim Elliot put himself and four others in. Yet, God placed Moses with his back to the Red Sea. He put Jehoshaphat in an impossible spot. God did that to David, Gideon, and Samson. I would even dare say Jesus. Yet, Jesus said "*not my will, but yours be done.*" I'm sure Cassie, Jim, and many others declared the same thing as they died like the Martyr Stephan. The best-case scenario is not to die so soon. There is more to do on this earth. What I'm painfully trying to illustrate is: be a warrior in tough places. What God does with you (and others) in tough places is not your call. If, you want His will, then be in His will regardless of the human outcome.

I didn't get that for so many years. When we come from the world, our human nature has one thought: what can church do for me? Face it, it's true! What are my gifts? What is my role? Is church fun, comfortable, and safe? Make a list of all the things you like about your church. How many of those things revolve around what you prefer. What is your comfort level? You will be supersized at how much we want our church to make us feel at home. To serve us as we serve them. Yet, how often do we pull that service when church gets messy?

I'm done with that. The time is now! For years God has called me. Yet, time after time, I told God I'm not willing to do it if it's messy. Sure, I would try for a while. Then I pray to God "they are not letting me." "They are not listening to me." What if your ideas are falling on deaf ears? Think of Jonah. He was asked and ran away. Then he went begrudgingly back to where it

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all began. The sad part is the end. In his heart, Jonah despised what God did for the people of Nineveh. Yet, he wanted to be God's man, didn't he? However, was Jonah only willing to be that man by his own rules?

My answer to changing church is to be faithful where God places you, not where you want to be. Yes, we can turn the other cheek. Yet, if we hate (church) in private then were not turning the cheek at all, are we? A grudge can be described as being *resentfully unwilling to give, grant, or allow (something)*. Are you building a grudge in your heart if church is not comfy? What if it's not your way? That by no means says you must stay forever. Yet, how to find the joy of the Lord 101? Do what is placed before you joyfully. Be joyful doing something, being called, and being used by the Lord. Or begrudgingly (that word) do what the Lord has asked. Will you inadvertently be creating silent resentment towards God's plans for you. To do the Lord's will joyfully or begrudgingly: unfortunately, there is a difference.

Church tithing is a hang up with me. I do tithe, yet I don't give the whole 10% to my church. I know people who prefer to choose where their money should go. It's by their rules because it's their money. Personally, I hate it when people say it's God's money. We could say that God gives us money to buy food. We could say that God gave us a brain, two hands, and ability to work. God could ask us to use what He has given to tend the garden. Was Adam paid? Why work if God provides? What if God asks us to tend to the garden. To give back money we received for working? Is it possible God gave us a way to live. A way to earn a living. Why? Maybe it was the job and income that would be the sustainer for what we were really meant to be. Really meant to do. It seems that God provides and we give back, then God gives back by what we provided.

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There is another side. What if God lets us choose? I know it's a novel concept. You can choose to believe or not. Choose between heaven and hell. Yet, will God let you choose what to do with the money you earned by working? If God gives it then you cannot choose like with Manna. God gave the Manna and He told them what to do with it. But, if he lets you make a choice (about money) then it lands on your character, not His. I contend that God puts us in awkward spaces to see if we want character building or comfort. Money is an awkward space for me.

That's the question: to give it all or not? It's the tip dilemma. Did they deserve it? I will decide how much to give. Yet, we are to give. Some contend that in the New Testament era we are to give with our hearts. We are essentially free to give or not. However, deep inside the Christian faith is giving with the heart. What you give and how you give says a ton about your heart. I hold back 1% why? Is it to have just a little power over the church? Is it so that I can chose where it goes? What if I give the whole thing to the church and let God work out the rest?

God and I have been playing a game for years about money. I began with 5 bucks. Now I tithe about 11%. I don't have a particular problem with the church using my money as they see fit. I do believe they are accountable to God for what people bring in the store house. Yet, there is a small piece of giving I like to hold back. I want to listen to where it needs to go outside the church walls. Outside the tax return. Just give it away. Will I let the church have all of me? All of me in worship, service, and tithing? Stay tuned for book three, lol!

I mention money because it's so wrapped up in the Christian faith. It's tied to ministry. It's tied to our faith and pride. To give ourselves to the Lord means we trust Him with our finances. We should trust Him with our church too. Whatever we hold back says something about our dedication to church. Possibly even our dedication to God. Being a Christian is not about going

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to church and reading our Bibles. I wish it was because that would be easy. No, our Christianity is about our relationship with God. How we represent Him in this world. Is Christianity about salvation? Honestly, Christianity is about giving of one's time, space, and love. That's our God. He provides and we receive. Our hearts should say: I was loved by God so I too desire to share that love with the world as He does. I think I get it now.

Two books later I'm checking my heart. For over ten years I've wanted the church body to check their heart. Did it take me that long to get it? What if God knew? What if God knew it would take ten plus years to get Patrick to see His kingdom differently? It's an interesting theory. Did Moses need 80 years in the desert to see God more clearly? Did it take Paul (the missing years) to see God clearly? What about David on the run? Twenty-two years between His anointing and his kingship. J Vernon McGee says it was the time going through illness that helped him see missions on radio more clearly. I bet he saw his time as a pastor more clearly too.

I'm about to shock myself. Let's praise the church! "It's now" the time to help give the church a little light. Do they deserve it? Do I deserve grace? For so long I have resisted going to heaven. Yes, for years and years I didn't think I deserved to go in. At times I would pray to God to give my seat at the table to another more deserving. Recently, I encountered Paul saying he was the chief of sinners. Sure, I had read it before. Yet, there was Esau giving up his birthright for a bowl of soup. Then it hit me. What was my gift from God worth? Was it precious gems? Was it priceless? Or, was I willing to give it up for another? To pass it off because I am not worthy? Was it worth so little that I would not covet it, desire it, and horde it?

It seems so flippant to say I should horde my ticket into heaven. Yet, the giver is precious. His gift is priceless. What would anyone of us pay to have the fountain of youth? To live on earth forever? Yet, we have been offered that very thing by a God we claim to believe in.



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Don't I believe it? Wouldn't we fight to the death to, have it? What is my salvation worth? Frodo traveled through evil lands to fulfill a mission. So did Bilbo. Luke (in Star Wars) risked the unknown to find Yoda. Why do people stand so close to the cliffs edge and certain death at the Grand Canyon? It's because whatever they are seeking is worth the risk! Whatever they find will be beyond precious. It's now the time for me to treat God's gift the same way.

To further that point. It's now the time to let that attitude be a virus to others. To infect them with the same desire we have towards God's gift. Maybe the reason I have saved no one is because what I was offering didn't mean that much to me. Oh, I said it did! Yet, I have said "the lost know when Christians are full of crap." It's why the word hypocrite is famous. There is a boy who is dying of cancer. I was willing to give him my salvation just to save him. Then it hit me! Why was I willing to give it up so easy? Did it mean that little to me? That day I changed.

I have been lucky enough to have God decide to let me into His kingdom. I am not worthy but His gift is. It's now the time to hold on to this gift. To protect it at all cost. It's mine but it's also sharable. Others can have it too. Yet, first and foremost, on a plane, put the mask on ourselves first. That means I need to think salvation is precious. I need to believe that Jesus still has hope and interest in His church. Maybe in the days ahead the lost will see my zeal for the Lord. Maybe they can find that zeal themselves at my church? It's now!

This whole book has been about my desire for the lost. I was one of them. In so many ways I still am one of them. In-fact I'm glad for that. Often, I have wondered what life would have been like if I had become a Christian early on in my life. Yet, I still get shivers because I would have become one of the Christian snobs. Those who think the outside world is evil and not worth saving. Those who place barriers on those who were not born Christian. I know it's not all of them, but it is many of them. I have met very few Christians who love the world as God does.

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It's likely that I will always struggle with the church. The way they are structured will probably grind against me from time to time. Yet, if God gave me His church, I must treasure the gift.

I can see it clearly now. My way is my way. That does not mean I am right. I think I need to admit that the church can mold me and teach me a thing or two. This new pastoral group I am serving under have changed me. They have a structure called "the anointing" and it's a good thing. It states that God makes them responsible for the church. They are responsible for the church's actions. Yet, it's not all on them. If you have an issue, in the church body that needs addressing, then take it up the chain. Don't gossip and create grudges. Talk to those who are directly above you. Congruently, listen and obey the orders from above. It seems regimented, but it's all about the anointing. I get it. God anoints those he placed in charge to love those below them. The ones below, in-turn, love those under and over them. It's about spiritual flow to receive what God has for this body. It's a fantastic way to help the body of Christ love the right way.

How to love the church 101? It's to receive the anointing that the Spirit bestowed on those who lead the church. As cringe as that sounds I will second that motion. Love and encourage those above you and they will return the favor. The kicker is God. He will honor you if you honor those he put in charge. Even if those men and women don't love you back, God will. Yet, it's not about receiving but the giving. We received the anointing of Jesus as he died. Jesus gave and we received the blessing. There is a ton of truth in Philippians 1:21 "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" Sacrifice your honor and pride for the church regardless of who is leading it. God honors that attitude.

There is work to do. The church does need its feet held to the fire. I just don't believe that church is effective when it's safe and comfortable. It always needs a little edge to it. I'm going to

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continue to find ways to grow the church through saving lost people. They are the fire we need to keep the church honest. New people ask seeming stupid and redundant questions. Yet, it's those questions that remind the church of the basics. Reminds them of where they came from. The lost remind us of what sin is. Yet, it also reminds us of the effects of sin. Over time we do become just a tiny bit holier than we once were. It's the lost that will remind us why the great commission matters. Why we must leave just a little dirt on our feet.

With that said, it's time to go out of my way to praise those inside the church. Each one of them are human souls trying to make sense of the gospel. Those that think it's an easy message miss the point of it. The gospel takes (destined for hell) sinners and turns them into (destined for heaven) saints. Yet, in-between all that is growth, understanding, grace, mistakes, and mercy. We must build up the body. I get it why the Bible harps on two or more gathering. We are stronger in numbers. The gospel tends to get lost when we are alone. That goes for having too many people in the mix too. A group of believers must always be personable. Your group is too big when you can't feel their spirit being hurt or happy.

The church needs to make room for the lost. That means we need to have plenty of room for failure and mistakes. Grace was bestowed by God for that purpose. Not one is worthy, not one. Yet, God, in His mercy, gave us grace to be sinners. Is the goal of a Christian to be holy? I say it's the goal to help sinners find heaven. A team wins a championship. One fumbles while another scores. Yet, if they all buy in to what the coach is preaching, they win as a team. Do you believe that the team includes the fallen world? Is heaven a place for saints only? You're badly mistaken if you believe that. Not one human in the entire history of humankind will walk into heaven holy. Not one!

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I've said enough! Church is human. The lost are human. The time is now to bring humans together in the name of Christ. To be as Christ and not like the world. That means church needs to be different than the world. The message must remain the same. God loves the fallen. Church mice games kill the mood. You know it does! One person rejected by the church is one too many. Does God reject people? If He saved me then He can save anyone. Paul believed it. David believed it. Jesus believed it. It's now or never to be the church that Christ intended. Enough of the corporate charade, be the church instead. Enough of the prideful thoughts that your better than the outside world, be the church instead. You needed saving and so do they. Give a reason for the lost to say the name of Jesus for all the right reasons towards our church.

Luke 9:23-25 *“And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”*