

## Chapter 19 (Heart)

Deuteronomy 30:12-14 *"It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 13Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 14No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it."*

Over 20 years ago now I became a Christian. For 33 years before that I had heard about Jesus. Here was my take on Jesus before I became a Christian. He held lambs. I suppose he was white. This man had long hair and wore robes. Hippie? My memory is not perfect. However, I can't remember any moment when Jesus became something more than a hippie lamb holder. Personally, I have a better recollection of Noah in a children's book at my doctor's office. Instead of knowing what Jesus would do; I would have said: who is Jesus?

It's troubled me since my conversion that I had met people who went to church in my youth. Yet, I never met Jesus. I can't even recall ever hearing about this man. I have memories of a picture of the white guy holding a lamb on my grandmother's wall. In my youth, was there a Jesus follower that changed my perspective? Did any religious person change my life? I am unaware of any real Jesus conversations before my 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

I did see a John 3:16 sign at the world series. I did attend a few youth groups. I did have a few Christian friends. I suppose those men were Christ followers. Yet, I am more disturbed at the trend. They never introduced me directly to their best friend: Jesus. Honestly, I think it comes back to my main beef and struggle with the church. We preach Jesus but we don't live the heart of Jesus. For over 20 years now I have struggled with what Jesus is to me.

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It's not that I don't believe in him. Oh no, He has been real enough. It's just that Sunday after Sunday I hear of what Jesus would do. I have heard what I should do. Yet, the heart wanders. The mind wanders. Years ago, I heard a great sermon on prayer. The pastor was honest and said that at times during prayer his mind wandered. Thoughts of sex and fishing interrupted his prayer thoughts. He told us to stop and claim those thoughts. Pray for those thoughts to be understood. I have often wondered about that. I know what he was talking about. Yet, there was more. Should I be worried that I have wandering thoughts?

I love listening to Dr. J Vernon McGee of the radio program Thru the Bible. He made the comment once that if your wandering, it might be because you're wandering. Maybe Jesus does not seem real to you. You're just trying to fit him into the life you live. The life you understand. What happens when understanding Jesus is difficult? Putting the two together seems at odds?

Read Ephesians 4. I am beginning to see a picture here. This whole chapter is famous; however, verse 20 sticks out. This verse is the lynch pin that has rattled around in my heart, soul, and mind for 20 years. *"That is not the way you learned Christ!"* How do we learn Christ?

Through the years I have been belted over the head with Jesus' stuff. One guy says were going to hell without Jesus. Another screams that all we need is Jesus. I told you in a past chapter that my kids went through a terrible youth night. They were threatened with hell. I mentioned that incident to my son and he only recalls another incident with Christian speaker Miles McPherson. Miles was honest and direct. Yet, he attached Jesus to hell. It's probably not unbiblical, but it was quite memorable.

One of the reasons my kids don't go to church is attaching Jesus to hell. I suppose some well-meaning Christians would say they were confronted with Jesus and chose heaven over hell.

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I just don't see it that way. Is the term hell and what it represents "how they learned Christ?" The message to my boys is believe or go to hell. Is there a due process to learn Christ? Can't we have the time given to Moses, David, Paul, and Peter to understand? These Christians gave my 10-year-old boy 30 seconds to process who Jesus is. The choice was either heaven or hell.

Within our prayer life we are confronted with Jesus. Thoughts flood our brain on what he represents. Our life, thoughts, and desires mash up against Jesus. Hell, mashes up against Jesus. God says to Job "*who can contend with me?*" Our lives try and contend with God. My thoughts fight against him. My actions grind against him. Yet, the heart of God knows. It provides grace to learn. To understand through the process.

Within all this is Jesus. He is the way the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the Father except through Jesus. I can try to be holy but I will fail. Just tell all the outsiders that joy is found only in heaven not hell. Just sustain your church through plug and play. Create three words that honor the Christ. Do those things and the church will love the world! The world will love the kindness of the church too. Oh, wait a minute, where is the church in this world?

Believe it or not but saved men received the church. They received the word. Now, what they have done with it is another story. Belt people over the heart with Bible verses. Pursue laws to restrict sin. Deny people the right to enter into ministry based on gender or past actions. Take a closer look at God in heaven. He kicked Adam and Eve out directly because of past actions. He punished David for sexual discretions. Yet, these folks are part of the building blocks of grace. They are foundational in the Bible story.

Where is the heart of the church? Is it found in cliky life groups? Is it found in amazing worship and dynamic preaching? Is it found in your churches mission statement? It comes back

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to the cup of cold water. What a stinging indictment of the church. Cold water has got to be one of the simplest forms of love. You don't have to do anything to get it. Just give it freely. Yet, the heart of church requires obedience. I have heard a pastor boldly proclaim that you're not Christian if you don't serve in a church. I can surely see the heart flowing through that statement. Does the church have the ability to just give out a cup of cold water? Would they even fathom how or why? Instead, it's more like you must be obedient or you will go to hell.

I will curl back to Jesus. How did he treat those he met? I saw an advertisement by a church mentorship group. They claimed that they could help your church surpass the 70 people mark. They also claimed that churches get stuck at 200. This group then advised that this is not how we should teach Christ. Stuck in plateaus? To be a Jesus follower is to go beyond and reach new heights. Then they offered solutions to this problem for a small fee. Two things here. Is there a solid biblical program to grow your church? Secondly, those numbers are people. Can you see that. That is 70 people. This company then went on to say they that have a formula to church sustainability. To reach beyond those 70 or 200 people. Is that the heart of the modern church? The plateaus of 70 and 200. Breaking the plateaus of sustainability.

In essence, why did God not want Israel to hold a census? To gather horses and wives? To count what you have been given? It's directly because of what the modern church does. We build programs to go beyond these people plateaus. Our eyes and hearts pass those plateaus too. The people on the backside of a plateau? The 70 or 200? They get lost in the vision. They get forgotten in the climb. I thought church was about love, the heart, and people?

Do we commercialize Jesus to break the plateaus? We hear lofty statements like "One way or another the heart of a church is Christ Jesus." I have heard more statements like this until the cows came home and went back out again. From t-shirts to wrist bands, I have heard about

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Jesus. Yet, the church is hollow. We talk a big talk about Jesus. Yet, our heart leans towards the plateaus. Making church sustainable and successful. Then we know that God has blessed us. Then we have done Jesus' right.

I am drawn back to my youth. Who taught me Jesus the Christ? This book and my journey have led me down the road of "The Christ." If Jesus is this person, then Jesus would emulate this savior, messiah, and Christ. It's pretty simple really. This chapter is called "Heart." How is Christ and the heart relevant to each other. Oh, sure we can say Jesus saves. We can decree that Jesus is love, but is that this Christ? How did you learn Christ? It comes back to a little verse in Ephesians 4, verse 20.

Ephesians 4:20 "*But you did not learn Christ in this way.*"

Plateaus are good. To have two hundred saved people is awesome. To have 1000 saved people is even better. Be honest here. J Vernon McGee believed that 95% of his church congregation over the span of 40 years were not saved. They just enjoyed the church ride. Church on Sunday justified their lives on Monday. Is church a revolving door? A growing entity? A job that puts food on the table? Is this what the Christ taught us Jesus would be?

Bear with me as I travel down a small rabbit trail of the Christ. This verse above has irritated me for over 20 years. What does it mean? Why, at times, do I feel Christ less? We say ungodly things. I feel ungodly things in my prayer. I know I'm not alone. There are good days and bad days with this Jesus thing hovering over my soul. With that said, let's take a small look at this Christ.

We all know that the Gospel of John is famous for its opening line. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* I don't know if there is a more

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epic opening besides Genesis 1:1. If you return to the beginning of this chapter, you will see Deuteronomy 30. Verse 14 begins with *“No, the word is very near you.”* It then goes on to say *“it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.”* Can you see it yet? Check out Romans 10 below.

Romans 10:9 *“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

There is a common idea that the Christ of the Old Testament is Jesus. I did a small study of this Christ. Who is he? The first five Books of the Bible only mention this Christ 4 times. In each instance it’s a description of a priest. It is not a description of a man to come. Over the centuries we have developed this Messiah into a man. It all begins with Eve. Genesis 3:15 is famous because some theologians have said this is the first promise of the messiah. Is it?

*“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

I don’t plan on getting into a theological debate. However, through the years this verse has morphed into a promise through the seed of Abraham. A king in the line of David. Deuteronomy 30 is not writing about Jesus. Yet, Moses believed that a promise of God was coming. All through the centuries this promise was seen. It grew into a man.

Read Romans 10 right through. In many Bibles is a concordance of extra verses attached or similar to the one you’re reading. It can be helpful. Look at the list of verses attached to Romans 10. They tell a story. Isaiah knew about this promise of a man to come. Check out chapters 28 (I see a stone) and 53 (arm of the Lord) for starts. Maybe Joel saw something (being saved by God) in chapter 2.

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This Christ is an idea. It's a promise. It's hope, faith, and belief that God would fix the mess Adam and Eve started. Jesus is not just merely the Messiah, Christ, and savior. No, he embodies all that the ancient Bible readers saw. They saw it in Genesis 3:15. All through the Old Testament Moses, Isaiah, and the likes of Joel saw it too. I would say that God began "the Christ" as a promise, but he also planted a seed of hope. Is the seed of Eve just a man? What if it was the essence of God? A hope that someone would do right in the name of God. To restore our relationship to God.

They all knew. They all got it. Isaiah knew, Joel knew, and "Yes" Paul knew. I can freely admit that Romans 10 is ridiculous. *Who can believe if they don't hear?* Look at verse 17 "*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*" That's it in a nut shell. The whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The key is found in the words "*through the word about Christ.*" Sure, I've read it. Sure, I've heard it, but I never got. It's much more than just saying Jesus is this ancient Christ. Instead, we should say Jesus is what the Christ would be.

To make a long story longer, Jesus did fulfill the Christ. He talked about what it means to be Christ-like. The main theme from beginning to end in the Bible is the heart. This word of God must dwell in your heart. To top that off, we must have God-like, Christ-like, and Jesus-like hearts. So, my stinging question throughout this book is: what is church to you? Basically, does you and your church have the heart of Christ?

I have said it from my Christian beginning (mockingly) that this is soul surgery. My heart has never been right since the day I first entered a church at 33. I bawled like a baby that day. I have cried like a baby many other days since. Every time it's directly because I had a breakdown. What is Jesus to me? Why, at times, am I not Christ-like? Thankfully, I feel that

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after writing all that I have, I'm beginning to get it. The message of Jesus is the message of Christ. Put people first. Put the world first. The Christ was a hope in that.

My heart needs to bleed Christ. What does that mean? What is the Christ? It's the road of two hearts: mine and God. If I seek the road to God's heart then undoubtedly I'll find mine as well. I know I'm beating a dead horse but plug and play is the dead horse. The heart of God is mildly found in playing church. It's mildly found in life groups and great sermons. Does your heart bleed for the lost in this world as Jesus' heart bled for you? The concept of the Christ was built and developed over the ages to redeem people.

In my studies on who is the Christ, I found a string of themes. The ancient writers wanted someone to rise up and lead them back to Eden. Through the centuries it has morphed into a savior that would release them from captivity. Yet, within all this was the prince of peace. There is a ton of soul surgery talk. Ezekiel 36:26 "*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*" Into the New Testament era we find Jesus honing in on this theme, *the heart*. Matthew 6:21 "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*"

Where is the heart of a modern church? They claim it's found in Jesus. It's found in the sacrifice of planting a church. the mission of Christ. Yet, the first 70 are pushed aside to make room for the next 130 people. They too are pushed aside to make room. All along it's done in the name of Jesus. Yet, church needs to be honest here. Our heart and eyes are on plateaus far more than people. This generation needs soul surgery. A new heart transplant to reclaim the mission of the Christ. So, how does God plan on doing this? Through war or taking back the promised land? No, it's by capturing your heart. How? By giving you a Spirit will be more concerned with capturing the hearts of people than growing a church.



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I'm going to say that the heart is harder to catch than a falling star. Only an idiot would believe that the church is just fine. If I was an unsaved person sitting at a bus stop outside a church, do I care about church? What if church had its heart in the community? Maybe that person at the bus stop would look at the church and say "they are good people; I have heard so many good things about that place." However, we all know the unsaved are not saying that are they? How can the church capture the ordinary person? Be there in their time of need. That a tough place to be when usually sin is involved.

We can capture a heart of love for a time. Then the relationship settles in. Chasing a heart in a marriage is twice as hard after ten years. You can't just recycle the same old. You just can't. Instead, we make a pact to date more. We make sex nights, and buy flowers. A good marriage is trying all the doors to keep the heart beating within their marriage. Ignore that relationship and a long cold winter is coming.

Church has played the church game a long time. A very long time. We (the church) have a relationship with the world. Here's is how it goes. The world gives us tax breaks and religious freedom. The church intern will leave them alone. Over the last few centuries, the church has tried to break that pact. They have picked on abortion, homosexuality, and vices. They have tried to restrict the very freedoms that God gave everyone. All it's done is divide the world.

I will admit there is a strange line between Christ-like living and the ways of the world. Yet, Paul knew. He counters with "*But you did not learn Christ in this way.*" Jesus did not play the divide game. Oh, sure he said there would be divide. You can't please them all. However, Jesus went to the lost. He went to the misunderstood. This Christ-like man's actions were a bridge between the world and heaven. Those verses in Romans 10 ask a question "how can they know if we don't teach them?" How can they love Jesus if we don't show them what the Christ showed

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us? While church is playing this long-standing game with itself, it has forgot to show the world Christ.

Instead, the church tells the world that its evil. It tells the world that it's wrong. All along Christians work in-house. Ignoring the relationship with all of Gods people. But patrick, the believers in church are Gods people? For God so loved the world? I would also dare say that God was willing to sacrifice Christ-likeness on the cross to save the world. The church is far better off dying with love and integrity than ignoring the world. How will they know unless we show them? It means sacrificing ourselves, our integrity, and our appearance to love like Jesus did.

As the church plays the church game, it has no heart. To spend our calendar year just trying to maintain church has no heart. I know a pastor that said he was fine with the revolving door. You can't concern yourself with people coming and going. He was also in charge of volunteering in the church. Plug and play. It does not matter who is plugged in as long as the spots are filled. Why? To maintain church. Where is the heart in that?

I went to university for four years. I have a degree in Theology. I am attending a church that is willing to have a pastor that has no degree. How did he learn Christ? I must admit I struggle with this. He has no credibility with no degree. Is that true? How did he learn Christ? What if, and I repeat, what if he learned it from the Spirit. What if? It somehow seems wrong but what if?

There is a danger in following a man who claims he is self-taught. A real danger. Yet, what if this man did indeed learn Christ through life's trials. Through attending church. Through books and the odd course. What if he learned. What if he gained the Spirit and loves the Christ Jesus? What if he equally gets the message of the Christ? Is it possible that this man loves people more

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than the degree and the church denomination? I'm just asking because I struggle with the normal way in-which we ordain men of God.

It's not the way I would do church. The leader or pastor must be taught. Then I got to thinking. What if God taught him to love people first? To make friends first. What if he reads his Bible and then tells us what he learned? Is that how we learn Christ? I will admit I believe the certificate is safer. Learn Christ the right way. Yet, with all the terrible Christianity I've witnessed by the educated, maybe something needs to change.

My heart wants good Christianity. I went to school to be a pastor for a reason. I wanted to learn Christ. To be a Shepard of the word and people. When you reduce your pastor to a facilitator, the heart grows faint. It's like in the movie Jurassic Park. The archeologist said "you can't feed Raptors, it's not the way they are made. They need to hunt." Pastors are people. people need to hunt for God. Search for God. Yes, even pastors, need to learn Christ.

Learn Christ how or where? I'm telling you as plainly as I can. Raptors need to hunt for the food they need in the wilderness. People need to find God in the lost world. Why was Jesus and John the Baptist found (quite often) in the wilderness. That is where God is. The most passionate Christians are usually the newly saved. They are on fire for God. How often have pastors tried to calm them down. Temper their fire. Why? To make the newbies as lifeless as them.

Facilitating church has been said to be rewarding. To work the revolving door a privilege. You want better Christians? You want a vibrant church that does crazy things in the name of God? Send your pastor out into the world. This is going to sound strange but bring in the heart of the world by sending your pastor out. Jesus went out and brought people in. Those people became the cornerstone of Christianity.

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How to really grow your church 101. It's simple really, your church must have heart. It must bleed for the lost. Your church must be convicted that it's never doing enough for the world around it. Let your pastor never forget what it's like to be in the real world. Don't let him or her facilitate. All you'll get is a lifeless raptor waiting for the dinner bell. A church is a body. Ok, let me say it again: a church is a body. A body need to be fed, exercised, and loved. Who loves the church more than the lost that are found?

Your church will grow if you love the first 70 to death. It will grow if the first 70 love the lost to death. Money? What do you think will happen if 70 people love the lost? You will grow. Money will flow. Plateaus? Toss them. Numbers? Toss them. Focus on people. Have a pastor that is a people person. Let him or her run amuck in them. If your feeling wanted and loved you will gladly give. If you feel your Christianity growing you will desire to share. Facilitating plug and play is a pastor and heart killer.

You are not a business. Oh, I know you have told (for years) that you are. Over and over, we are told a church is a business. It's just wrong. It's a little Jesus factory. In a way it's a little Jesus laboratory. Were all under the microscope. Everyone is watching. How do you really grow a Christian? Funny enough, experiment on them. Let them try things to grow ministry. To grow their passion for the Christ.

This rumor of a Christ has lasted for thousands of years. Over the millennia, the mystery of the Gospel was created. That Jesus is the Christ. Paul said the mystery has been revealed. Jesus is everything that God the Father is. The Spirit will show us the truth. The church should always be in flux. Moving the gospel along as it has for thousands of years. The trinity theory did not happen in the garden. The same can be said about how we have currently done church.

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I am reading a book by Chuck Swindoll called *Come before winter*. He has a chapter on progress charts of human advancement. We have exponentially grown in the last 50 years. This world has gone crazy. Chuck also claims the church has receded within that time. However, the corporate model of church has grown to the mega church. Bigger, better, faster, more. As the world has skyrocketed, so has the church. He said that the church must keep pace. I respectfully disagree.

It seems like the right thing to do. We need to keep up with the times. Yet, what do people crave the most these days? A chance to slow down. To breathe in this fast-paced world. Why is God said to be slow? It's because fast is not necessary. We are trying to franchise church into the fast Gospel business. Why is it not working? It's because people need meaning. People need love. You can't do those things at hyper speed. Training people to put their McDonalds garbage away is no different than plug and play. The church should never be a functioning robot.

It needs heart. Sermons are getting smaller. I have been to two church plants and the sermon is 25 minutes max. We are in and out of church within an hour. I will give the Pentecostal church down the street credit. We head out to church 25 minutes away and they have already started. As we come home, they are still going on. I know they have worship, then a coffee break, and finish with the sermon. It's a community gathering more than church.

All faster does is get you home faster. It jams the gospel in faster. Imagine knowing it's three songs, a 25 minutes sermon and home in-time for the NFL. Yet, at work, we are pushed to move it. I find it fascinating why a place like Disneyland has such success after all these years. Why are cruises so popular? Some say they are boring but once you have experienced desensitizing yourself from fast pace, a strange sense of calmness overcomes you. Just get sucked into the world of Walt Disney. Time stands still.

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The heart of church is found in standing still. Learning the art of listening. The art of communication. Caring for something other than yourself. How do we do that in this world? Church was the answer. Sunday was community day. A chance to slow down. To listen and relax. A chance for the heart to be warmed and broken with the stories of people. How can we possibly know what people are going through in an hour-long service?

It comes down to this for me. The Spirit will discern. God can prompt us to talk. Church used to be a place where coffee and conversation happens. I can't imagine the friendships gained through talking. I went to a church for 10 years. It took 8 years to meet this guy who had been going there the same amount of time. 8 years! I had never seen him before because he attended the other service. My thought is time. The church made so little time to meet people. It was always a rush to usher them in and usher them out.

Church needs to slow down, not speed up. My goodness we need to slow down. Just pumping them through is so heartless. At McDonalds its smart business. At church its ridiculously stupid. It takes time to grow people. How can we be there if were always heading home. Slow church is not time consuming and boring. We tell ourselves that because the corporate world behaves this way. Yet, family, friends, and community need the time and understand. You can't do that in an hour.

So, the answer is life groups. I know a church that guarantees people won't meet for more than two hours. It's supposed to replace slow church. Why? Tell me why? It's to allow the church to remain corporate. To just crank them out. Keep the revolving door oiled. It relieves the pastor of getting too involved. I truly believe that most churches have very little heart. The Spirit is fully unplugged. Instead, we are mashed into no more than three hours a week to make friends,

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grow the community, and make mature Christians. It's just a heartless notion to believe that works.

With that said, let's take a look at the body. What should it look like? If the body of Christ (church) had a fully functioning heart. What would that look like? How could we possibly slowdown in this world? People say millennials can't handle community. They are moving too fast. Did we ever give them a reason to slow down? To reflect and grow? Shouldn't church really be offering a soul retreat on Sunday?