

MOVING OUT OF THE SANCTUARY AND INTO THE STREETS

"Jerry Cook's perspectives on the church today are not only insightful, they are incarnational." — **DR. JACK HAYFORD**

Unless there is a church on Monday, the church on Sunday makes no difference. Drawing from the book of Ephesians, best-selling author Jerry Cook clearly lays out how Christians can be the church on Monday—not just in buildings on Sunday, but 24/7 in the clutter, confusion, and hard work of everyday living.

It's time we stop *doing* church and time we start *being* church—in the world, on the streets, among the people. This book will show you how.

"Jerry Cook's perspectives on the church today are not only insightful, they are incarnational. His proven pastoral views of these principles shows they work! They bring both vitality and viability—it's the 'right stuff' because it not only lives, it lasts!"

DR. JACK HAYFORD *Chancellor of King's College and Seminary;
President of the International Foursquare Church*

"Jerry's teaching transforms our thinking to remind us in a fresh way that our freedom in Christ is powerful every day . . . that we can live passionately and allow God's love in us to touch others in surprising ways. You will be encouraged, delighted, and challenged to be your very best!"

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"God put Jerry Cook in my life to challenge the way I think and do church. This book will help any reader explore the possibilities of what can happen after the benediction. Jerry has helped me understand how much more exciting and effective 'church on Monday' can be when the people of God understand their strategic placement in the culture."

DR. JIM HAYFORD SR. *Senior Pastor of Eastside
Foursquare Church in Bothell, Washington*

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THE MONDAY MORNING CHURCH

COOK



Bus Stop 

THE MONDAY MORNING CHURCH

Out of the
SANCTUARY
and Into the
STREETS

JERRY COOK

Author of *LOVE, ACCEPTANCE, AND FORGIVENESS*

Over 300,000 copies in print

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Table of **CONTENTS**

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction: The POWER of the CHURCH on Monday	3
Chapter 1: The RADICAL RELOCATION of GOD	11
Chapter 2: A WINDOW in TIME	23

Part 2: WHO YOU ARE

Chapter 3: Where CONFIDENCE BEGINS	39
Chapter 4: Will the REAL YOU Please STAND UP?	57
Chapter 5: EMBRACING Your New IDENTITY	69
Chapter 6: YOU ARE What You BELIEVE	81

Part 3: WHAT YOU HAVE

Chapter 7: HOPE, WEALTH, and POWER	95
Chapter 8: ALIVE and FREE	103
Chapter 9: TRANSFORMED and COURAGEOUS	111
Chapter 10: WELCOME to the FAMILY	127

Part 4: HOW YOU LIVE

Chapter 11: A WORTHY LIFE	143
Chapter 12: The CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE	157
Chapter 13: A LIFE of LOVE	173
Chapter 14: NOT in My NEIGHBORHOOD!	189
Epilogue: GOD'S PLAN for YOU	209
Notes.....	213

The
POWER
of the
CHURCH
on Monday

The church on Sunday is great. I love it and enjoy it. But what I get really excited about is the church on Monday—the body of Christ at work in the world.

Some time ago I was given the book *The Christ of the Indian Road*, written in 1925 by Earl Stanley Jones, a Methodist missionary to India. Jones had been remarkably inept at making Methodists out of the people of India. Finally he decided to abandon his conventional Westernized missionary venture and, instead, “place Jesus on the Indian road” in a simple, clear, and unacculturated way. Furthermore, he determined not to demand a certain response to his message but to let each person decide what he or she would do about Jesus. The results were astounding, greatly influencing missionary strategies of the future.

“Christ is becoming a familiar Figure upon the Indian Road,” Jones wrote. “He is becoming naturalized there. Upon the road of India’s thinking you meet with him again and again, on the highways of India’s affection you feel his gracious Presence, on the

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

ways of her decisions and actions he is becoming regal and authoritative. And the voice of India is beginning to say with Whittier:

The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again.¹

It is this "placing of Christ on the road," whether in India or America, that is our crucial mission as Christians. We are called to make Jesus accessible to people, right where they live. It is also our only hope for effective evangelism that penetrates deep into the fiber of society. This mission requires an acceptance of certain basic principles:

- The essential gospel centers on the person of Christ, not the church, not even evangelism. The gospel is Jesus. He is the "good news." Everything else is vehicular to an accurate presentation of him.
- The church is "his body"—the body of Christ—"the fullness of him" (Ephesians 1:23). Of course, that's not the only statement in the New Testament about the nature of the church, but it is definitive when it comes to the church's presence in the world.
- The model for the church is Jesus. The Gospels give us a picture of the ministry of the church. What we see in the life of Christ is what we ought to be seeing in the life of the church.
- The book of Acts gives us an example of what happens when Christ is accurately placed in both the religious culture—

Introduction: The POWER of the CHURCH on Monday

"in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria"—and secular cultures—"to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). When and where the church has failed to carry on this approach, cultures have failed to be truly Christian. Tragically, the great majority of cultures we read about in the book of Acts are now Muslim. Part of the blame has to be laid at the doorstep of the institution the church has become.

- Christ's own incarnation teaches us that "incarnational Christianity" (the presence of Christ in culture) can only be accomplished by persons, not institutions. This is not to devalue institutions or organizations. It is to say, however, that the person of Jesus can only be clearly communicated through the people in whom he dwells.
- Colossians 1:19 tells us that the fullness of God is Jesus. Christ is the perfect model of what the word *incarnation* means. He is how God dwells in men. After this same model, we as Spirit-filled believers can now step into the incarnational experience. Jesus, of course, is the "only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14 NKJV), so we are not sons of God in the same way he is. However, we can look at Jesus to understand how the Holy Spirit joins himself to our humanity in a way that puts the treasure in clay pots (see 2 Corinthians 4:7) without devaluing the treasure or destroying the pots. He is present in us at all times and in all locations.

With these truths in mind, then, any effort to present Jesus as Savior must focus on the *church on Monday* rather than the *church on Sunday*. No matter how big the church on Sunday becomes, it

Part I: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

will never penetrate the culture with Jesus. The reason is clear. The church on Sunday is experienced by the church community; it is only observed (if noticed at all) by the unbelieving community.

The church on Monday is an entirely different matter. It operates *in the experience* of nonbelievers. It lives on their turf, moves in their society, and operates in their culture. On Monday Jesus is "on the road." He ceases to be one of the characters in the program of the institution called church. Rather, he works beside people. He eats in their restaurants and banks at their branches. He has coffee in their front rooms and hangs out by their water coolers. He is in their lives. He is incarnate. And because he can be seen and touched, he can be received or rejected. True evangelism is possible.

Strategic Placement

Most Christians have been trained quite well to be the church on Sunday. But what does it take to train believers to be the church on Monday?

The first step is to help them recognize their strategic placement. By "strategic placement" I mean this: each redeemed, Spirit-filled Christian has been strategically placed by Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church. Where each believing man or woman lives and works is part of that strategy. Christians are people of destiny, purposely placed by God deep inside our culture. They are his points of incarnational penetration. Because of them Jesus is present at the very heart of society. And it is this strategic presence of Christ that opens the door for his revelation as Savior to an unbelieving world.

Incarnational Christianity doesn't try to get people to God.

Introduction: The POWER of the CHURCH on Monday

Large numbers of men and women don't want to get to God. Others are unaware there is a God to get to! The incarnation was God coming to us; in a similar way, incarnational Christianity brings Jesus to men.

That's the basis for true evangelism: in the believer the presence of Christ reaches out to the unbeliever. It's also the basis for true discipleship: in the believer the presence of Christ walks alongside the new believer. Thus, the two main activities of the church—conversion and discipling—are wed, as they were meant to be. The Great Commission, after all, does not simply say to go into all the world and make converts; we are to go and make disciples.

Jesus said simply, "I am the way. If you have found me, you have found God." Unfortunately, somewhere along the line, the church added a debilitating step to the divine program. We said, "Jesus is the way to God, and the church is the way to Jesus. Come to the church and find Jesus, then Jesus will take you to God." Any training that we do, any leadership that we exert, must correct this error. We must never allow the church institution to be the way to Jesus. Jesus himself is the Way. The goal of the church on Monday is to make the Way present and visible in a world where people are lost. And, through incarnational Christianity, he is!

Open for Business

Of course, it does no good to have a strategic force in place if the people don't know they are strategic, don't know they are a force, and don't know they are in place. Most Christians, I think, give some kind of mental assent to this idea of strategic placement, but they have no concept of its implications or of their direct

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

involvement. Some think in terms of inviting hurting people to a church program; others think of using some type of soul-winning gimmick to make a convert. Most, however, don't do anything with the idea at all. It simply floats around, untapped, in the background of their Christian experience. They're strategically placed, but they're not "open for business."

yes!
I'm convinced that if more Christians would get open for business, then more business would begin showing up. The question is, how can believers get informed, affirmed, equipped, and open for business, so that the business of Christ in the world can take place through them?

This question brings up several important issues to consider, both for individual believers and for the church community. If incarnational Christianity is going to have an impact, individual believers must:

1. Redefine ministry (both as to content and location)
2. Redefine church (both as to function and identity)
3. Reevaluate their reasons for being a part of the church community
4. Rethink their reasons for work
5. *Hmm...* Reestablish the distinction between profession (the way they earn a living) and vocation (their destiny—being Jesus in their world)

*** The church community must:

1. Redefine leadership

Introduction: The POWER of the CHURCH on Monday

2. Redefine success
3. Redefine purpose
4. Begin with the church on Monday and work toward Sunday
5. Ask, "What does the church on Monday need to accomplish its ministry?"
6. Ask, "What does the church on Monday need when it gathers on Sunday?"

Confidence, Courage, and Trust

Many years ago I wrote a book with Stanley Baldwin entitled, *Love, Acceptance, and Forgiveness*. In it I shared how Christians could become the body of Christ in their communities by practicing real love, acceptance, and forgiveness toward others.

I consider *Monday Morning Church* a sequel. It elaborates upon the principles in that first book and gives them a firm biblical context. In the opening chapters that follow, I deal with the huge implications of Colossians 1:27: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." I also suggest the ultimate Jesus Question that the church, as Christ's body, must pose to a secular, godless, and hurting world: "Is there anything I can do for you?" ***

In the rest of the book, I describe how we, as Spirit-filled people, are equipped and deployed by Christ to be the church on Monday. I believe that understanding this equipping and deployment will produce confidence, courage, and a renewed trust in God and his work in us. In fact, I almost titled this sequel, *Confidence, Courage, and Trust*. Just as love, acceptance, and forgiveness must be the hallmark of how we live and what we do in the world, *lll*

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

so confidence, courage, and trust must be the very fiber of who we are.

Love, acceptance, and forgiveness without confidence, courage, and trust can become passive and idealistic. Confidence, courage, and trust without love, acceptance, and forgiveness can lead to arrogance and pride. But put them together and release them into a fallen, godless culture, and the very person, life, and redemptive power of Christ is unleashed!

As you will see, I have chosen to work out the concepts in this book through a study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I've found that preaching and teaching from Ephesians, without fail, builds confidence, courage, and trust in individual Christians. It redefines our very understanding of Christian-ness!

This book is not a commentary, however. Rather, my intent is to use Paul's message as an illustration and dramatic guide to becoming the church on Monday. If we listen carefully, this little letter, written so long ago, will tell us in clear and unequivocal terms who we are, what we have, and how we are to live in order to accomplish the phenomenal task of being the resident presence of Christ on earth.

→ Evangelism as a primary goal is often artificial and powerless. But when it's a serendipity of Spirit-filled believers being Jesus in their world, it is natural and unstoppable. It's my fervent prayer that this book will sharpen our hearing, expand our understanding, and release us confidently, courageously, and in full trust to be Jesus to the world around us. May you and I, together, become the church on Monday!

The RADICAL RELOCATION of GOD

You are called not so much to do great things, as to be a great person—and that person is Jesus Christ. The church of Jesus Christ is the resident presence of Jesus in the world. That's a foundational principle of incarnational Christianity.

I remember when the Lord began to nudge me about becoming a pastor. I was in my late teens, and I didn't want anything to do with the ministry. I wanted to be a doctor, because a doctor could make money and also take care of people. Those two things, in that order, were important to me. Interestingly, the Lord didn't seem to care about my plan all that much, even though I explained it to him numerous times.

The reason I didn't want to go into pastoral ministry wasn't because I had something against God or the ministry; it was that my concept of the church and church life was warped. In my young mind, a pastor was the director of religious activities. He put the meetings together and invited people to come and participate. The

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

good pastors did it well, and the poor ones flunked. I didn't want to be an activities director for anything—religious or otherwise.

Still, there was an awareness deep within me that if I were to really follow the intentions of the Lord for my life, I would end up in pastoral ministry, regardless of anything else I might try to pursue. During my university and seminary training, I still

carried this ambivalence. I knew being a pastor was what God wanted me to do, but I didn't like the idea.

Our seminary held a chapel service once each week. Along with the many scholars who spoke during those services, one distinguished pastor always visited once or twice a year. His name was Dr. Richard Halverson, and he was pastor of a large Presbyterian church in Washington,

D.C. For many years he was also the chaplain of the United States Senate. A deeply godly man, he always spoke life to our hearts. Scholars from all over the world gave us theological treatises, few of which we could understand. As proper seminarians we tried to appear intelligent and interested. But when Dr. Halverson came, we felt as if Jesus were speaking to us.

After one of these services, some of us were having coffee in the cafeteria when Dr. Halverson joined us and began a conversation. One of the students asked, "Dr. Halverson, where is your church?" This seemed like a perfectly reasonable question to me, but Dr. Halverson looked quite perplexed and hesitated to answer. Then he glanced at his watch.

"Well, it's three o'clock in Washington, D.C. The church I

**The church is
not an
activities list ...
the church is
people!**

Chapter 1: The RADICAL RELOCATION of GOD

pastor is all over the city. It's driving buses, serving meals in restaurants, sitting in board meetings, having discussions in the Pentagon, deliberating in the Congress." He knew exactly where his church was, and he went on and on with his lengthy listing. Then he added, "Periodically, we get together at a building on Fourth Street, but we don't spend much time there. We're mostly in the city."

Awesome !!

A bomb went off in my head. All of my out-of-joint ideas about the church suddenly snapped into place. I heard that the church is not an activities list. It's not a series of things people do. The church is people! If it were simply a series of activities—well, I already had plenty of things to do in my life. But if the church, in fact, is people, then I could be interested—even excited!

It was a wonderful revelation. It presented something to which I could give my life. Because to me, people are very important. I love people.

My wife was putting me through seminary by teaching school. When she came home that day, I announced, "Honey, I found out what the church is!"

"Well, that's good," she replied, "since in about six months we'll be pastoring one."

Excitedly, I recounted the conversation with Dr. Halverson, and she got excited with me. What would happen if we took seriously the concept that the church is people—people in whom Jesus really does dwell?

We began discussing and exploring the idea. All kinds of scriptures began to fall into place. For instance, "The church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1:22-23). That's a bombshell of a verse! The

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

church—the fullness of Jesus? If that’s true, then it has incredible implications for those of us who make up the body of Christ!

Then there’s Colossians 1:26–27. Paul mentions a mystery, a secret, that God kept so well, no one even knew he had a secret! Paul wrote, “The mystery . . . has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory.*”

If you think of the church in terms of activities, then these verses make no sense. They’re just religious simile; figures of speech. But what if the church is people and God really indwells these people? Then these verses are profound. They captured my attention back in seminary. They still hold it firmly today. In fact, it is the pursuit of this concept that has been and still is the focus of my life—this matter, this experiment, of Christians being Jesus in our world.

Often people think of God as distant, “out there.” We sing to the God out there, imploring him to come here. We go to God’s house and beg him in religious tones to join us. Where does he come from? Where does he go when we leave? Does he hang around empty buildings, hoping we’ll come back and see him sometime?

If Colossians 1 is true and Christ really is in us—well, that changes everything! If “Christ in you, the hope of glory” defines actual reality, our perception of God, the church, and ourselves, as believers, must change. The implications are astounding. And the first implication is this: there has been a radical relocation of the expressive presence of God.

Chapter 1: The RADICAL RELOCATION of GOD

Stage 1: God Out There

As we go back through history, we can see this radical relocation taking place in three stages.

Stage 1 is recounted in the Old Testament. The God-out-there begins to act into our reality. He comes upon the sacrifices; he comes upon the prophets; he comes upon the mountain. He has to act into our reality, because we have separated ourselves from him. It’s not that he moved away from us; it’s that we chose to live without him. Now he begins to reestablish his presence in a way we will be able to understand and respond to.

Our very lives depend on his succeeding. When we chose to live without him, we didn’t know we’d made a fatal step. We didn’t understand that our life source is not biological only; our life source is spiritual. After God formed man out of the dust of the earth, he, then, did what had not been done before in all his creative activity: he “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). The word *breathed* can be translated *kissed*. This man, this human being, this living soul, was alive, not simply because of biology. His life was based on an intimate relationship with God.

It is the same for all of us. When that intimacy is broken, the soul dies. We didn’t understand this. But now God begins to act into our reality in order to reestablish this life-support system of an intimate relationship with himself. He begins acting from out there to come to us here.

I have to admit, when I consider this God of the Old Testament, he seems pretty austere, severe, unpredictable, even frightening. I mean, think of the story in Numbers 16. The sons of Korah and their families were wiped out in the wake of his anger, when the

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

ground opened up and swallowed them after they'd complained and rebelled against Moses and Aaron. (I'm glad God no longer swallows complainers. That would thin out the church ranks real fast.)

Frankly, he bothers me. He feels a little arbitrary; makes me nervous. He knows too much and has too much power. The children of Israel believed if you saw this God face-to-face, you would die. He was held in such awe that they would not even pronounce his name.

The God of the Old Testament establishes the fact of his reality and his holiness, but he also establishes the fact of our vulnerability. There's something deeply and fatally wrong with us. We know there is a God, and we know we are in some way responsible to him; but we can't seem to fulfill that responsibility. To appease him, we take our lambs or our turtledoves and offer a sacrifice. The high priest spills the blood and says a prayer, but we walk away from the altar the exact same people we were when we came. What a terrifying state to be in—aware of the wide abyss between us and the God-out-there, but unable to do anything to close the gap!

Some time ago a popular song announced that God is watching us from a distance. That's not a comforting view. If there is a God and the best he can do is sit out there and watch us, we don't have a loving God on our hands; we have a sadistic monster. If he can sit and watch the horror and terror and bloodshed and suffering of humanity and do nothing, he's not the kind of God who can do us any good. Our pain is too deep, our hopelessness too real. A God who watches from a distance is a mockery.

But God is not a mockery. Through the ways and words of

Chapter 1: The RADICAL RELOCATION of GOD

this God of the Old Testament, we are given an unfolding revelation; an ongoing, progressive revealing of his person. His law is like a schoolmaster bringing us to Christ (see Galatians 3:24). The God-out-there begins to reveal his character. He becomes clearer; we gain understanding as we go.

Nevertheless, we eventually come to an impasse. By the end of the Old Testament, we understand there is still a huge gap between us and God, a gap we cannot possibly bridge. We can't go to him; he's beyond our reach. Unless this austere God-out-there actually steps over the gap and into our world, we have no hope.

Stage 2: Emmanuel—God with Us

When we think about this type of God coming to be with us, it's not particularly good news. If he's coming to town today, I'll leave until tomorrow, thank you, and you can tell me how it went! We don't really want to meet him. It's not that we don't like him; we're afraid that he won't like *us*.

How can he come to us in a way that doesn't terrify us, in a way that doesn't cause us to run and hide? How can he step into our world and our lives at a nonthreatening, intimate level?

Doesn't he choose a remarkable way? He simply slips into a little nothing town called Bethlehem as *a baby*. No one is intimidated by a baby. We hold this infant in our arms, bounce him on our knees. We don't know we're holding God; we have no idea. He takes our hearts. Then he grows up. He lives with us for thirty years, and we don't know he is God. We think he is a carpenter. We buy tables and chairs from him.

"Where'd you get that table?"

"In Nazareth—that carpenter made it."

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

“Joseph?”

“No, the kid, Jesus.”

“Incredible table. A real artist.”

Of course it’s an incredible work of art. *God* made the table! But we don’t know he is God. He is one of us.

God Isn’t Angry

When we do find out that Jesus is God, we’re shocked. He isn’t the way gods are supposed to be. He is very different. In fact, the first thing we notice is that he isn’t mad at anybody.

Of course, before this moment, we had written the book on God based on a God-out-there. You get wrong ideas about a God who is separate. You don’t understand what he’s really like. When we wrote the book on God, he was angry, because we dressed him in clothes like ours. If there was a God and he knew people like us, he’d be pretty upset, right? So all our mythologies included an angry God—if not enraged, then disgusted, unpleasant, insensitive; a God who had to be appeased. We developed elaborate systems to accomplish a tenuous safety.

I’m shocked at how many people—even Christians—are still trying to love a God they’re convinced is angry or out to get them. They blame the difficulties of their lives on a God who’s punishing them. They don’t really know who God is.

That’s why Jesus comes—to reveal God fully. As Jesus steps into our reality, God himself steps into three dimensions. “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,” Jesus says (John 14:9). Of course, we can’t see all of God; our perception is restricted by time and space. But what we do see is accurately and fully God. Jesus is fully representative of who God is. That means if Jesus is not angry

Chapter 1: The RADICAL RELOCATION of GOD

with us, then there is no God out there who is. *There is no angry God out there.* That’s quite a revelation!

God Doesn’t Condemn Us

Not only is Jesus not angry, but some of the things he says are very ungodlike. For instance, he says, “I have not come to condemn you.” That’s a strange statement in the mouth of God. We’re certainly sinful, and he is certainly holy. There is plenty of room for condemnation.

That’s why the story of the woman caught in adultery is so amazing to me (John 8:3–11). What is going on inside her as she lies there in the middle of the street, the leaders of the city standing around her and proclaiming that she deserves to die? To them she is nothing more than a piece of garbage to be disposed of. What would happen inside *you* if you heard yourself described that way—if you were the object of such derision and obscene ridicule?

They declare, “Jesus, our religious law says adulterers should be killed. What do you say?”

“You’re right, let’s kill her,” Jesus replies. “The one of you without sin, you begin the execution. You throw the first stone.” Then he bends over and writes something in the sand.

I’ve heard sermons and theories about what Jesus wrote; frankly, we haven’t got a clue. (I have a friend who thinks he was writing the names of the woman’s accusers and the dates they had visited her. I don’t know; it’s a compelling theory, isn’t it?) All we know for sure is when Jesus looks up, the city leaders are gone.

Now the woman is left with the one person who *could* throw the rock, the one person without sin. Without a doubt, this is her

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

unlucky day. What a vulnerable position to be in—alone with God in your sin!

At this point in the story, I can't help but wonder: *How is Jesus going to deal with this woman?* I consider myself a pretty loving person; but if I were Jesus, I would certainly moralize a little. Obviously,

there's a direct connection between the mess she's in and the life she's lived. Sometimes it's helpful to draw attention to such connections. *How is Jesus going to take advantage of this teaching moment?*

To my astonishment, he doesn't! Instead, he asks her, "Where are your accusers? Doesn't anyone condemn you?"

She replies, "No, my Lord," and you can almost hear the unspoken words that

surely followed: "What are *you* going to do?"

That's when Jesus makes this remarkable statement: "Neither do I condemn you. Now go, and don't sin anymore." He doesn't bring up her past. He doesn't mention her lifestyle. He makes no commentary of any kind on her condition.

You're missing a great opportunity here, Jesus! You've got a ready-made audience. Forgive her, but make her pay a little. Make your point.

He didn't make his point, and he never does make his point in a condemning way. Instead, he says, "I haven't come to condemn you."

Incredible! God comes into the world, and he doesn't condemn us. My question is, *Why not? We're surely condemnable, and*

You can either condemn or give life, but you can't condemn and give life.

Chapter 1: The RADICAL RELOCATION of GOD

you're a holy God. If you haven't come to condemn us, why have you come? What are you doing here?

His answer is too good to be true: "I have come to give you life" (see John 10:10). You see, you can either condemn *or* give life, but you can't condemn *and* give life. You can't do both; you must choose one or the other. If Jesus were to choose to condemn us, we would have no hope. But he chooses to give us life.

The Jesus Question

Another curious thing Jesus says is this: "I did not come to be served" (see Mark 10:45). That's very ungodlike. The way we wrote the book, gods are for serving. If you serve them well, they'll be nice to you—most of the time. If you don't serve them well, they'll get you. Sometimes even if you do serve them well, they'll get you! But the order is clear: we serve them; they don't serve us.

Yet here is Jesus Christ stepping out of eternity to reveal the only God there is, and he says, "I haven't come to be served." Now to me that doesn't make sense. Again, my question is, *If you haven't come to be served, why are you here? Why did you come?*

And again, his answer is amazing: "I haven't come to be served, but to serve."

Immediately I begin to recall all the questions Jesus asked throughout the Gospels. Almost always they came down to this: "What can I do for you?" What were his first words to blind Bartimaeus? "What would you like to have me do for you?" What about the lepers? "What can I do for you?" What about the man at the pool? "What can I do for you?"

I call it the Jesus Question. It's simply this: "Is there anything

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

in your life about which only God can do something?" Jesus has come to ask that question. Not to condemn us, not to set us straight, not to deepen our guilt, not to make a point, but to ask a simple question: "Can I do anything for you?"

Now, if I were to ask you, "Is there anything I can do for you?" it wouldn't be rhetorical; I would mean it. I would want to help. But we would quickly come to the point where I'd have to admit, "I really would love to, but I can't do that. I'm at the end of my resources."

But what if Jesus were standing in front of you asking the same question? It's an entirely different question, isn't it? There are things only God can do for us. He has come to make his resources available to us in the midst of our hopelessness.

To me, it's almost beyond belief that God would come to us not in anger, not to condemn us, but to give us life and ask this question, this Jesus Question. That's what stage 2 is all about: Emmanuel. God with us. God asking, "What can I do for you?"

My thought is, *What could be better?* But it does get better. There is still a third stage in the radical relocation of God.

A WINDOW in TIME

The last conversation Jesus had with his disciples is fascinating—even amusing, from our vantage point in history. By combining the accounts in Luke 24 and Acts 1, we can assume it went something like this:

Jesus is standing on a hill called the Mount of Ascension.

"Fellas, I'm leaving," he announces.

They say: "Where are you going?"

He replies, "Well, you can't come."

They ask, "So what should we do?"

He answers: "Go back to Jerusalem."

"What should we do there?"

"Well, just hang out."

"How long should we stay there?"

"Until the promise of the Father comes."

"Uh, what's that?"

"You'll know it when it arrives."

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

“How long should we wait?”

“Just stay there until it comes.”

“Well, what should we do then?”

“Do what you’re told.”

“Is that it?”

“Basically, yes.”

“Is there anything else?”

“No, not really.”

And while he’s speaking, he begins lifting up off the ground.

Now, we don’t do much of that where I come from. Personally, I don’t want people floating off in the middle of a conversation. If I’m talking to you, stay on the ground! We read so many of the stories in the Bible as if everything that happens is expected and normal. The fact is, the disciples really hadn’t seen much of that kind of thing either. A person lifting off the ground wasn’t something that happened every day in first-century Israel.

So here they are, watching Jesus, and you can be sure they are as dumbfounded as you and I would be. In fact, the Scripture says that as Jesus goes out of sight, they are standing there looking up; the exact biblical phrase in Acts 1:10 means “gaping openmouthed into heaven.” I can understand that. I certainly would stand there “gaping openmouthed into heaven” too.

But angels see that sort of thing all the time; it’s no big deal to them. So they come and ask, “What are you looking at? Go on and do what Jesus said.”

“Well, he really didn’t tell us to do anything.”

“Then just go on back to Jerusalem and hang out.”

So the disciples return to Jerusalem and hang out. What else can they do?

Chapter 2: A WINDOW in TIME

Stage 3: God in Us

One day, when they are all together in an upper room, they hear a loud noise—something like the approach of a really big storm. Dr. Luke, an eyewitness, wrote later that it sounded like a “rushing mighty wind” (Acts 2:2 NKJV). But they look out the windows, and the trees aren’t moving; dust isn’t flying. When they realize this isn’t a natural phenomenon but rather a supernatural one, each person immediately understands something very profound is happening. Their history suddenly explodes into the present.

This “rushing mighty wind,” they know, represents the presence of the God of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hundreds of years earlier, when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, the Egyptian armies pursued their Jewish slaves to the edge of the Red Sea—an apparent dead end. But then Moses took a stick, reached out over the sea, and said a prayer. The people went back into their tents, and a “rushing mighty wind” blew all night. When the Israelites awoke in the morning, the sea was parted, and they crossed on a freeway. They were saved by the wind, which graphically depicted the supernatural presence of God.

These 120 people gathered in the upper room knew the Exodus story well; they’ve heard it repeated over and over since childhood. Now *they’re* the ones experiencing the “rushing mighty wind.” (The Greek phrase for the wind in Acts 2:2 is the equivalent of the Hebrew phrase in Exodus 14:21.) Surely something remarkable is happening. Is this the “promise” Jesus told them to wait for?

If there is any doubt, the next symbol makes it crystal clear: fire appears in the room, yet the room is not on fire. When we think back to what happened that day, we often assume fire simply

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

appeared on the people's heads; but if you read the grammar and text closely, it's clear what appeared first was a ball of fire in the center of the room.

Again, for the disciples, history leaps off the page. Throughout the Old Testament, fire stood for God's supernatural presence: the fire on the mountain, the fire that consumed the sacrifice, the pillar of fire by night. And now the fire is in the upper room! There can be no mistake. The disciples know they're in the supernatural presence of God—the God whose name their people will not pronounce, in whose presence they think they will surely die.

God is in the room with them—and, yet, they feel no terror, no fear, no panic. Why? Because, in the person of Jesus, God had walked with them for three-and-a-half years. He was not unknown; he was not the God-out-there. Through Jesus, he had been fully revealed to them. He had become Emmanuel, the God with us.

Then the most remarkable thing happens. No wonder Jesus's last earthly conversation with them had been so short and lacking in detail! Jesus knew they'd have no frame of reference for understanding what was about to take place.

From the single ball of fire, little flames (Acts 2:3 calls them "tongues of fire") begin to peel off and come to rest on the heads of each of the 120 people in the room. There is no longer a central fire; it has dispersed, and the fire is on each individual. Where is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob now? He is not just with them. He is in them. God has come to dwell in them!

Now, suddenly, the strange words Jesus spoke to them at the Last Supper make sense: "He lives with you and will be in you" (John 14:17). And the words before his ascension? When Jesus

Chapter 2: A WINDOW in TIME

told them to wait for "the promise of the Father," he didn't mean a promise the Father was making to them; he meant the promise of *the Father*. There is now a unique residency of God in each of them. The intimate relationship between God and man, broken so long ago, has been reestablished!

It all begins to come together: Stage 1 was "God out there." It was what their ancestors had known. Stage 2 was "God with us." It was what the disciples had come to understand as they walked with Jesus those three-and-a-half years. Now, in the upper room, they are ushered into the most amazing stage of all—Stage 3: "God in us."

When the profundity of what has just happened sinks in, their reaction is far from fear. They begin to rejoice! "Can it really be true?" "Is God really *in us*?" In fact, they get so carried away with joy, the people on the street think they're having a party. *They must be drinking, the people assume. After all, no one gets as happy as they sound without a little artificial help.*

Then again, they reason, as they hear the disciples continue in their revelry, *the bars haven't been open long enough for anyone to get that happy.* So they draw closer, curious to find out what's going on.

Peter stands up to explain. He reaches back eight hundred years into Israel's history and picks out as his text four verses from the little book of Joel.

Now, the book of Joel is about grasshoppers—big grasshoppers called locusts—that had overrun the country, absolutely

**Through Jesus,
God had become
Emmanuel, the
God with us.**

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

devastating everything in their path. By the time the locusts were done, the countryside looked as if a fire had swept through it.

We don't know much about Joel. We don't know where he came from or where he went. The book of Joel is his only recorded sermon, and it takes up only three chapters. Apparently, Joel stepped out on the stage of time, delivered his message, and left. And his message was basically this: if you think this plague of locusts was bad, wait till the day of the Lord comes. That's the book of Joel.

It's a pretty simple message—except for a few statements Joel dropped about two-thirds of the way into it. For eight hundred years those statements were left hanging, suspended in Jewish history. If Jewish literature referred to them at all, it was to say, “We don't know what they mean yet.” For eight long centuries they remained a mystery.

But now Peter reaches back, picks up those verses, and declares, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.’” Then he continues quoting those remarkable verses recorded in Acts 2:17–21:

“Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

Chapter 2: A WINDOW in TIME

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day
of the Lord.

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be
saved.”

What an incredible statement! And what a perfect fit with what the disciples had just experienced!

The Last Days

Something was born on that day of Pentecost—something called “the last days.” Joel said, “In *the last days* these things will happen.” What the disciples experienced in the upper room was the beginning of the last days.

We know from Scripture, then, when the last days began. We also know the last days will end. We just don't know *when* they will end—only that “the great and glorious day of the Lord” will forever close the last days window.

So what we have is this: a specific period of time determined by God, with a distinct beginning and a distinct, although undisclosed, ending. Within this time frame, God has a profound purpose. From Joel's prophetic message, we know this purpose works out through three continuing events—things that never happened on our planet before and will never happen again:

1. A Prophetic Community Is Formed

Before that day in the upper room, there were prophets, and there were schools of the prophets; but there had never been a general community of prophetic people. Pentecost changed that.

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

★ What do prophets do? Consistently throughout Scripture, prophets do three things. They do them at different times and in different ways, but they basically do the same three things: they see, hear, and speak from God's perspective. They bring God's perspective into our human reality.

Now, in the last days, there is a community of people—men, women, girls, and boys—all of whom are capable of practicing these three prophetic things, wherever they are. They are not specialists upon whom the Spirit occasionally comes. They are people who live in prophetic awareness, because God is in them. As a result, God's perspective is available at all times, at every stage and level of life, throughout the population of the planet.

2. The World Falls Apart

Joel said that in the last days, signs such as blood, fire, and smoke would appear in the heavens and on the earth. Biblically, these signs represent the world as we know it falling apart.

3. People Call on the Lord

The third thing that happens in the last days is that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Let me ask you a question: when do people tend to call on the name of the Lord to be saved? Often it is when their world is falling apart. Have you ever been with anybody whose world is falling apart? Did he or she call on the name of the Lord? I've observed people call on the name of the Lord in one of two ways, and occasionally both: Sometimes they pray and sometimes they curse. Sometimes they curse and pray. All they know is their world is coming apart at the seams. They hurt in places they didn't know

Chapter 2: A WINDOW in TIME

could hurt, and they don't know what to do about it. They know they need help—not some kind of general help, but something deeper, something more.

May I suggest something to you? These are the last days; we are that prophetic community; and it is our world that is falling apart. The reason we're here at this specific point in history is to bring God's perspective into the world's devastation and respond when people call on the Lord to be saved.

I'm convinced that as Christians we're not about programs. We're not about bigger or better blessings. We're about responding to people who call for help because their world is falling apart. These individuals aren't looking to be converted—they're looking for help! Being their help—by being the presence of Christ in their lives—is the *only* thing we're about. Everything else we do is secondary and can even detour us from carrying out the true purpose of the church.

Responding to the Call

Let's make up a story. Let's say you're at work, on a coffee break. As you stand there in the lounge pouring your coffee, one of your colleagues joins you. You greet him and ask how he's doing. Out of the blue he begins telling you about the night before.

"You know, I think last night was about the worst night of my life."

"Why?" you respond. "What happened?"

"My son is seventeen, a very responsible kid," he says. "He asked to use the car and went out with his friends. Usually, if he's going to be late, he calls and lets us know when he'll be home. But last night it was past midnight and he hadn't called, so we

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

got concerned. Finally the phone rang at 2:00 a.m. My wife and I were frantic; we were afraid to answer it. I picked up the phone, and there was a policeman on the other end. He gave a name and asked if that was my son. I said yes, but I was afraid for him to go on. I didn't know if my boy was dead or what.

"The policeman said, 'I'm sorry to inform you that your son has been involved in a crime with another boy. We've arrested him, and he's in the city jail. You can come down and we'll release him to your custody, but he'll have to come back for a trial. It's a serious situation.'

**You simply ask,
"Is there anything
I can do for you?"**

"I couldn't believe it. My son's never been in trouble; it was the furthest thing from my mind. My wife and I drove down to the police station. We didn't even know what to say to each other. They brought my son out in handcuffs. Our eyes met, and I didn't know what to do. They took the handcuffs off, and we got in the car and drove home. I'm still stunned. It just feels like my whole world is disintegrating around me."

Why is he telling *you* this? You don't know him—at least not *this* well. Other people overhear snatches of the conversation and understand this man is having trouble with his son. But you, you're not just "other people." You're a prophetic person in whom Jesus Christ himself lives. You're hearing what Jesus would hear if he were standing there. That's why this man is talking to you.

This man is calling on the name of the Lord. He doesn't know it, but Jesus knows. Jesus doesn't want him to be alone when his world begins falling apart. That's why you're there. Perhaps the

Chapter 2: A WINDOW in TIME

only reason you've had this job for the last five years is so you'd be there having coffee on the morning this father's world begins to crumble.

How do you respond to this man? What do you do? That's the important question now. Give him your pastor's card and tell him to call the church office? Invite him to the service on Sunday? It's a crucial moment, isn't it?

I'd like to suggest that those kinds of encounters are happening all over every city—including yours and mine. Very often we don't recognize what's going on; or we recognize it, but we don't have a clue what to do. A response is so simple. But we've taken fifteen weeks of classes on how to win souls; we've memorized hundreds of scriptures that we don't know how to apply. If people so much as blink religiously, we try to jam it all down their throats. We try to get them converted. But is evangelistic technique what's needed here?

Let me ask you a simple question: if Jesus were standing there, what would he do? What *did* he do when he was faced with the catastrophic in people's lives? When he was approached by people whose lives were coming apart? What did he say? What was his question?

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

That's all you do: you ask the Jesus Question. It doesn't take fifteen weeks of advanced Bible study to do it. You don't have to be a Christian for fifteen years first. You don't have to have all your problems solved.

You simply ask, "Is there anything I can do for you?" This is the question that releases the life and ministry and gifts of the Holy Spirit into your everyday world. "Christ in *you*, the hope

Part 1: WHERE IS GOD ON MONDAY?

of glory.” *You* are filled with the Holy Spirit. That means Jesus is present. And that means when you ask the Jesus Question, you are fully equipped and capable of responding exactly the way Jesus would.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit were designed for the street, for moments like this. They weren’t given so that Christians can work them on each other. The gifts of the Spirit are how Jesus works through you to touch the lives of hurting people.

Let’s go back to our story. After listening to your colleague and recognizing the prophetic significance of what is going on, you begin to respond.

“You know, I have a son too,” you say, “and I can only imagine how I’d feel if I got that phone call. Is there anything I can do for you?”

Maybe you wouldn’t use those exact words; that’s OK. Respond in the way that’s natural to you. Everyone listening to this man’s story would respond differently to the situation; that’s why the Holy Spirit has *you* there. He wants it done the way *you* would do it. If you get nervous and try to follow a formula, you’re going to blow the whole thing. Don’t get religious—just relax and respond the way you’d naturally respond to a hurting person.

Let’s imagine further. “Well, you know, my wife and I don’t have many friends,” your colleague says. “We both work, and we were thinking last night, ‘Man, we’d sure like to have someone to talk to.’ I don’t want to impose on you, but maybe it would help if we could have a cup of coffee together tonight and talk.”

Don’t you dare say, “It’s Wednesday night, and I have to go to Bible study!” This is what Bible study is about, right here—this is it!

Chapter 2: A WINDOW in TIME

If all our activities don’t serve encounters like this, then they’re a colossal waste of time. Being a Christian isn’t about programs—how big and how many and how much and how great. It isn’t about position or power or getting blessed. There’s an eternity in heaven to be blessed, and we’ll have plenty of time to enjoy it.

Our time here is about being Jesus in our world. Jesus didn’t come to our planet on vacation; he came on assignment. Likewise, you and I have not been born into these last days accidentally. There’s divine strategy at work. We don’t just happen to be where we are, bumping into people whose worlds are falling apart. God placed us here on purpose.

I don’t believe in fatalism, but I do believe in destiny—and we are people of destiny. Remember, you have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. You are filled with the Spirit of God. You are living in this window in time called the last days. You are where you are because God strategically placed you there.

The question is, Are you open for business?