

CONCLUSION

LIVING FOR THE CAUSE

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It is late in the afternoon on July 2, 1863, and the 20th Maine Volunteers are about to enter the annals of American military history. They are being led by Colonel Joshua Chamberlain, who is completely dedicated to the cause of preserving the Union during the American Civil War. He left his home, family, and a comfortable teaching position as a college professor to march hundreds of miles south to fight to restore the Union and was about to face the ultimate test of resolve.

As they rushed uphill through the woods at Gettysburg, they were placed on the extreme left of the entire Union Army. His commanding officer told him that he must "hold to the last man." Being the end of the line, he could not retreat. Already the rifle fire from the enemy could be heard growing louder to their right as other units were enveloped in the fighting. As the smoke grew thicker, their opponents could finally be seen approaching through the woods and preparing to charge their line. His Maine men were outnumbered almost two to one, but he had the advantage of the high ground. His men quickly dug in and awaited the crush of the attack. Then, for over two hours they fired volley after volley as they were attacked with desperate charge after desperate charge. At one point the lines of the two foes were totally enveloped with one another as brutal hand-to-hand fighting took place. Men were

falling all around him and Colonel Chamberlain was knocked over by a bullet.

As the enemies' lines regrouped for yet another assault, Chamberlain realized his men were almost out of ammunition. It became a stark reality that if they were attacked again, he would have to retreat. Knowing that this was not an option, he did what the desperate moment called for. He ordered a bayonet charge! Rather than waiting, he would take the fight to them, but with mostly empty guns. As they charged down the hill, the Southerners were so startled, they ran. Hundreds were captured. The day was saved by this desperate move, and for his bravery and sacrifice, Colonel Chamberlain received the highest award an American military hero can be given—the Congressional Medal of Honor.

What inspires people to be willing to lay down their lives like this? It is obvious there must be a grand cause to be willing to sacrifice for, to potentially die for. In Chamberlain's own words, "The inspiration of a noble cause involving human interests wide and far, enables men to do things they did not dream themselves capable of before, and which they were not capable of alone. The consciousness of belonging, vitally, to something beyond individuality; of being part of a personality that reaches we know not where, in space and time, greatens the heart to the limits of the soul's ideal."²⁰⁶

This conclusion is written with the conviction that the cause that has been unfolded in this book is such a grand cause. In fact, it is the greatest cause in the history of the world. It is a cause worth dying for and therefore worth sacrificially living for. This cause is the making of disciples, and God's chosen vehicle to do it is the church (Matt. 28:18–20).

A vision for how to do it has been laid out in this book, and we believe this is not just another theory of church or discipleship ministry. We have endeavored to present thoroughly biblical thinking based on such passages as Ephesians 4:11–16. Not only that, but each author is a person dedicated to the church and experienced in serving the local

church as it endeavors to fulfill this mission in a biblical way. Or, as we say in the Biblical Counseling Coalition, "Promoting personal change, centered on the Person of Christ, through the personal ministry of the Word." It has been written with the conviction that ministry is about people, not running programs.

We have emphasized that our Lord's main vehicle for accomplishing this mission is through the local church. The church is the most amazing organism on the planet and has amazing potential to impact a lost and desperate world. Unfortunately, many churches are intimidated by the culture, can't see the potential, and do not understand the mission.

In a day when Islam, secularism, and atheism are on the rise, wouldn't it be great if we saw a church that is wide awake and focused to the point of sacrifice? I know you agree. But what's holding us back? What will keep us from fulfilling the mission? I believe the answer is simple—*competing causes*. I only have so much energy, and there are many things competing for time and finances.

COMPETING CAUSES

Let's consider some of the causes that compete with *the* cause. In 1 John 2:15–17, the apostle John writes, "Do not *love* the world or the things in the world. If anyone *loves* the world, the *love* of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the *desires* of the flesh and the *desires* of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its *desires*, but whoever does the will of God abides forever" (ESV, emphasis added).

Notice that according to John, the problem is not a list of do's and don'ts. The problem is deeper and internal. It is about loves and lusts, wrong desires and soul-deadening delights. If we are loving or strongly desiring the same things as our culture, then we are on a different mission or our mission will be diluted. It is too easy for other things to become our cause, what we live for, which then consumes our time and resources. Let's briefly explore John's categories.

Desires of the Flesh

Many things could be highlighted under this category, but I would like to address one I see as a plague—living for comfort. Life is about taking it easy. I've known some so focused on taking it easy that it seems like their mentality is, "I don't want to push too hard. I might break myself." That type of mentality doesn't fit the wartime mentality illustrated at the beginning. It is obvious how this thinking distracts from the mission because there is not a willingness to sacrifice.

Desires of the Eyes

There are so many ways we can give in to the desires of the eyes. For example, is our obsession with watching movies and being tuned in to social media keeping us from fulfilling the mission? The "I need to relax" mentality sure can fill up time that could be used discipling and fulfilling our mission "to equip the saints" (Eph. 4:12 ESV).

Pride in Possessions

If the people of God live for finding meaning and purpose in owning stuff (just like our culture), it will definitely divert the church from fulfilling its mission. It ought to be clear why. The finances needed to make disciples both here and around the world get diverted to owning things.

The subtle strategy of Satan is to lull us into lethargy by living in a culture of abundance, prestige, and the dream of ease. It is so easy to love pleasure rather than love God (2 Tim. 3:4). Or love money rather than love God (1 Tim. 6:10). I feel the pull. Do you?

For many years I have been convinced that if the apostle Paul were in America, he would be preaching Isaiah 55: "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live" (Isa. 55:2–3 ESV). I'm a counselor so I have to ask,

What do you value? What are you passionate about? What do you look to for help in dealing with the pressures of life?

THE GLORY OF GOD AND CREATING WORSHIPERS

For our eyes to be less captivated with the world, we need a bigger vision to live for. We need something that has the ability to capture our attention. Well, the glory of God is about the biggest thing I can imagine! This leads to a perennial question: Is the church about evangelism or the glory of God? The debates have been long and vigorous, but the answer is that it's both. The biblical counseling movement desires to be captivated by the glory of God and the cause of God, which is creating more worshipers (others who are captivated by the glory of God). This really is the amazing mission. It has always been the mission. To see the earth filled with God-worshippers (see Gen. 1:26–28; Ps. 67:1–3). For this to happen, we need to turn from false worship to the worship of the true God, and this happens through the mediation of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Instead of being disciples of the world, we can become disciples of our Lord, who is the most God-glorifying person who has ever lived.

Paul was thrilled to hear this report about the church at Thessalonica: "For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9 ESV).

Competing Value Systems

Other authors have commented on this temptation the church has of giving in to competing value systems. John Piper has challenged the church for years to live with the Lord and His cause as our greatest delight. Piper wrote, "If we want to make people glad in God, our lives must look like God, not possessions, is our joy."²⁰⁷ Most poignantly Paul David Tripp wrote:

An idol of the heart is *anything that rules me other than God*. As worshipping beings, human beings always worship someone or something. This is not a situation where some people worship and some don't. If God isn't ruling my heart, someone or something will. It is the way we were made.... To make matters worse, this idolatry is hidden. It is deceptive; it exists underground. We can make this great exchange without forsaking our confessional theology or even our observance of the external duties of the faith. So we hold onto our beliefs, tithes, remain faithful in church attendance, and occasionally participate in ministry activity. Yet at the level of what we are really living for, we have forsaken God for something else. This is the silent cancer that weakens the church, robs individuals of their spiritual vitality, and leads to all kinds of difficulty in relationships and situations.²⁰⁸

THE SOLUTION

So, what is the solution? Let's go back to Isaiah 55 and see his clear answer. In verses 6 and 7 he writes, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The solution is repentance. Repentance and a wartime mentality.

Repentance

If false worship of the values of the world is the problem, then true worship is the solution. Or, as Paul said, we must "put off ... the old man... be renewed in the spirit of [our] mind[s]; And ... put on the new man" (Eph. 4:22 – 24 KJV). Or, in another place he wrote, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind (Rom. 12:2 ESV). We need a church that stops worshipping the same things as the culture. This would mean that after some serious soul searching to see what is robbing you of passion for the cause, some radical decisions would need to be made and forgiveness asked of the Lord.

A Wartime Mentality

Having grown up with grandparents and parents who lived through and even fought during World War II, I heard the stories of sacrifice for the sake of the cause. My mother worked in a munitions plant while my father was away fighting in Europe. They had been married just a few weeks when my father "shipped out." All the while, the family back in Pennsylvania had ration books. I still have some of those ration books, which represent the sacrifice the citizens of the US went through for the sake of the war effort. Virtually everything was rationed so that the military had what it needed to win. Can you see it? The church does not have this mentality. This preaches well and this talk is expected, but where is the passion for actually doing it? There is little passion *because the passion is going to other causes*. If a pastor lives for comfort and relaxation, like the culture, he will not be willing to put in the long hours necessary to see his church structured to make disciples. If a believer is living for materialism, just like the culture, then there will not be the necessary wartime mentality to sacrifice time and possessions for the cause.

John Piper helps us with our focus:

Over and over Jesus is relentless in his radical call to a wartime lifestyle and a hazardous liberality.... I need to hear this message again and again, because I drift into a peacetime mind-set as certainly as rain falls down and flames go up. I am wired by nature to love the same toys that the world loves. I start to fit in. I start to love what others love. I start to call earth "home." Before you know it, I am calling luxuries "needs" and using my money just the way unbelievers do. I begin to forget the war. I don't think much about people perishing. Missions and unreached peoples drop out of my mind. I stop dreaming about the triumphs of grace. I sink into a secular mind-set that looks first to what man can do, and not what God can do. It is a terrible sickness. And I thank God for those who have forced me again and again toward a wartime mind-set.²⁰⁹

You have heard here from servants of the church who yearn for the church to be *The Church*. Who dream of pastors/elders who fully embrace shepherding their flocks in the gritty-gritty of life (chs. 1–4). Pastors have written who have experienced, by God's grace, the church

being more than a weekend Bible conference where we sing songs and hear the Bible taught but, in addition, where true one-anothering is regularly taking place as the body counsels the body (chs. 5–8). Biblical conciliators who yearn to see purity in the body, repentance, and reconciliation have told you of resources to see it happen (chs. 9 and 10). You've even been given tools for how to work out this vision in your church no matter the size or location around the world (chs. 11–17).

It is a vision to see radical followers of Christ. It is a passion to see the real-life power of the gospel transform lives through local churches that are Christ exalting, God glorifying, led by the Spirit, and living by the principles of Scripture. We desire and are seeing the power of the gospel unleashed,²¹⁰ the potential of the church and para-church unleashed, and the beautiful wisdom of Scripture unleashed. The desire is for followers of Jesus Christ to be made as we also interact with competing worldviews (chs. 18–22). This has been the history of the biblical counseling movement, and it is our passion for the future (ch. 23). It is a big and wonderful cause to be part of! It is the greatest mission in the history of the world. Will you join us?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, hear our prayer. We yearn for Your church to be awakened and to regain its confidence in the power of the gospel and the principles of Scripture to radically change lives. We repent of the worship of the same things as our culture. We pray, Lord, for Your people to be awakened to the cause and to catch a vision for what each individual local church can be for Your glory. Help us, Lord, to live for big things, and thank You, Lord, for Your work through churches that are doing so. This we pray in our precious Savior's name. Amen.