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Books in One

DAVID  
PLATT

Best-selling author of *Radical*

THE  
RADICAL  
QUESTION



A  
RADICAL  
IDEA

DAVID  
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THE  
RADICAL  
QUESTION



A  
RADICAL  
IDEA



MULTNOMAH  
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THE RADICAL QUESTION AND A RADICAL IDEA

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THE  
**RADICAL**  
QUESTION

Imagine a scene that took place in Asia not long ago:

A room in an ordinary house, dimly lit, all the blinds on the windows closed. Twenty leaders from churches in the region sit quietly in a circle on the floor, their Bibles open. They speak in hushed tones or not at all. Some still glisten with sweat; others' clothes and shoes are noticeably dusty. They have been walking or riding bicycles since early morning when they left distant villages to get here.

Whenever a knock is heard or a suspicious sound drifts in, everyone freezes while a burly, tough-looking man gets up to check things out.

These men and women have gathered in secret, arriving intentionally at different times throughout the day so as not to draw attention. In this country it is illegal for Christians to come together like this. If caught, the people here could lose their land, their jobs, their families, even their lives...



I was in that dimly lit room that day, a visitor from America. I huddled next to an interpreter, who helped me understand their stories as they began to share.

The tough-looking man—our “head of security”—was the first to speak up. But as he spoke, his intimidating appearance quickly gave way to reveal a tender heart.

“Some of the people in my church have been pulled away by a cult,” he said. Tears welled up in his eyes. “We are hurting. I need

God's grace to lead my church through these attacks."

The cult that had been preying on his church is known for kidnapping Christians, taking them to isolated locations, and torturing them, my interpreter explained. Many brothers and sisters in the area would never tell the good news again. At least not with words. Their tongues had been cut out.

- *The tough-looking man*
- *was the first to speak up.*

A woman on the other side of the room spoke next. "Some of the members in my church were recently confronted by government officials," she said. "They threatened their families, saying that if they did not stop gathering to study the Bible, they were going to lose everything they had." She asked for

prayer, then said, “I need to know how to lead my church to follow Christ even when it costs them everything.”

I looked around the room. Now everyone was in tears. They looked at one another, then several said at once, “We need to pray.”

Immediately they went to their knees, and with their faces on the floor, they began to cry out with muted intensity to God. Their praying was not marked by lofty language but by heartfelt praise and pleading.

“O God, thank you for loving us!”

“O God, we need you!”

“Jesus, we trust in you!”

“Jesus, you are worthy!”

One after another they prayed while others wept.

After about an hour the room grew silent, and the men and women rose from the floor.

All around the room, on the floor where each had prayed, I saw puddles of tears.



The brothers and sisters in that Asian country have shown by their sacrifices just how much Jesus is worth to them. He is worth *everything* to them.

And they are not alone.

They are joined by brothers and sisters in Sudan who believe Jesus is worthy of their trust, even amid pain and persecution of genocidal proportions.

They are joined by brothers and sisters in India who believe Jesus is worthy of their devotion, even when they face threats from Muslim extremists in the north and Hindu extremists in the south.

They are joined by brothers and sisters all

over the Middle East who believe Jesus is worthy of their love, even when their family members threaten to kill them for professing belief in him.

They are joined by brothers and sisters around the world who believe Jesus is worthy of all their hopes, all their dreams, all their desires, all their possessions, all their plans, and all their lives.

But are they joined by you and me?

#### A DIFFERENT SCENE

Three weeks after traveling to underground house churches in Asia, I began my first Sunday as the pastor of a church in America. The scene was much different. No dimly lit rooms here; we were occupying an auditorium with theater-style lighting. Instead of traveling for miles by foot or bicycle to gather for worship, we had all arrived in millions of dollars' worth

of vehicles. Dressed in our fine clothes, we sat in cushioned chairs.

To be honest, there was not much at stake. Many had come because this was their normal routine. Some had come simply to check out the new pastor. I don't think any had come at the risk of their lives.

- *In America, the scene was*
- *much different. We had*
- *all arrived in millions of*
- *dollars' worth of vehicles.*

That afternoon crowds filled the parking lot of our sprawling multimillion-dollar church campus for a celebration. Moms, dads, and their kids jumped around together on inflatable games brought in for the occasion. Church members discussed a plan for using the adjacent open land to build state-of-the-art

recreation fields and facilities to support more events like this. Everyone, it seemed, looked forward to a successful future.

Please don't misunderstand this scene I'm describing. It was filled with wonderful, Bible-believing Christians who genuinely wanted to welcome me and enjoy one another. People like you and me—people who desire community, who want to be involved in church, and who believe God is important in their lives. But as a new pastor comparing the images around me that day with the pictures, still fresh in my mind, of brothers and sisters on the other side of the world, I could not help but think that somewhere along the way we in America have lost touch with what is essential, radical—even dangerous—about our faith and replaced it with what is comfortable.

In the days that followed, I began look-

ing further at my own life, at the church God has entrusted to me to pastor, and at the church culture around me. As I did, I was overwhelmed by the differences between our version of Christianity and the version of Christianity that prevails among our brothers and sisters around the world.

Instead of weeping together on our faces before God, we calmly sit on plush chairs in beautiful buildings.

Instead of going against the grain in our culture, we settle into our culture with lifestyles that are virtually indistinguishable from the world around us.

Instead of a simple, costly, humble, authentic, passionate, risky pursuit of Christ, we prioritize clean, elaborate, entertaining, slick, innovative church programs and performances that cater to our personal tastes.

And in light of these differences, I am

convinced we need to answer a fundamentally important question. What is Jesus worth to us?

### REDEFINING JESUS

Do we believe that Jesus is worthy of sacrifice in our lives? Our immediate thought would probably be, *Yes. Sure. Of course.*

But listen to how we describe what it means to follow him.

*Ask Jesus to come into your heart.*

*Invite Jesus to come into your life.*

*Pray this prayer, sign this card, or walk down this aisle, and accept Jesus as your personal Savior.*

You will not find one of these casual, contemporary catch phrases in Scripture. Instead, in Jesus' mouth you will find words that are foreign to us today. You will find phrases that

show us he is worthy of far more than a polite invitation. He is worthy of supreme devotion. Let me give you a few examples.

At the end of Luke 9, we find the stories of three men who approach Jesus, eager to follow him. Surprisingly, in each case Jesus seems to try to talk them *out* of doing so!

The first guy says, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

Jesus responds, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, Jesus tells this man that he can expect homelessness on the journey ahead. Even when the basic need of shelter is not guaranteed, Jesus is worthy of all our trust.

The second man tells Jesus that his father has just died. The man wants to go back, bury his father, and then follow Jesus.

Jesus replies, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”<sup>2</sup>

What could he mean by that?

- *I remember the moment I*
- *learned that my own dad*
- *had died of a heart attack.*

I remember distinctly the moment I learned that my own dad had died of a heart attack. In the days that followed, my heart was filled with an immense heaviness and a deep desire to honor my dad at his funeral. I cannot imagine hearing at that point these words from Jesus: “Don’t even go to your dad’s funeral. There are more important things to do.” Yet that’s the essence of what Jesus tells the second man who comes up to him. Jesus is worthy of total allegiance and immediate obedience.

A third man approaches Jesus and tells him that he wants to follow him, but before he does, he needs to say good-bye to his family.

Makes sense. But Jesus tells the man, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”<sup>3</sup> Plainly put, a relationship with Jesus requires absolute, undivided, exclusive affection.

*Trust me, even if it means becoming homeless.*

*Follow me, even if it means letting someone else bury your dad.*

*Love me, even if it means not saying good-bye to your family.*

Jesus is worthy of radical devotion.

The first time I heard this text from Luke 9 preached, it was from the lips of Dr. Jim Shaddix. He was my preaching professor, and I had moved to New Orleans specifically to study under him. Soon after I got there, Dr. Shaddix invited me to travel with him to an

event where he was speaking. I sat in the front row in a crowd of hundreds of people, and I listened as he began to speak.

“Tonight my goal is to talk you out of following Jesus.”

My eyebrows shot up in amazement and confusion. What was he thinking? What was *I* thinking? My wife and I had moved to New Orleans to study under a guy who persuades people *not* to follow Jesus?

Dr. Shaddix preached the sermon exactly as Luke 9 describes, warning potential disciples about what is involved in following Jesus. At the end he invited people who wanted to follow Christ to come down to the front. To my surprise, many in the crowd got up from their seats and came down.

I sat there dumbfounded. Then insight struck. *So this is just a preaching tactic, kind of a sanctified reverse psychology. And it works. Tell*

*them you're going to talk them out of following Jesus, and they will respond in droves.*

I decided I was going to try it.

- *My eyebrows shot up in*
- *amazement and confusion.*
- *What was he thinking?*
- *What was I thinking?*

The next week I was preaching at a youth event. Taking my cue from Dr. Shaddix, I proudly stood before the students assembled that night and announced, “My goal tonight is to talk you out of following Jesus.” I could see the leaders of the event raise their eyebrows in concern, but I knew what I was doing. After all, I’d been in seminary for a few weeks, and I’d seen this done before. So I preached the message and then invited students who wanted to follow Christ to come forward.

Apparently I was more successful than Dr. Shaddix in preaching that message. Let's just say that I stood alone at the front until the event organizer finally decided it was time for me to call it a night. For some reason I was never invited back.

Unlike what I thought about Dr. Shaddix, Jesus was not pulling a gimmick in order to get more followers. On the contrary, Jesus often seemed totally unwilling to cater to the crowds. He is so unlike us. We will do whatever it takes to draw the masses, but Jesus was constantly turning them away. Whenever the crowd would get big, he'd say something like, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."<sup>4</sup> Not exactly the sharpest church-growth tactic. I can picture the look on the disciples' faces. I can imagine their minds racing. *No, not the drink-my-blood speech! We'll never make*

*the list of fastest-growing movements if you keep asking them to eat you!*

- *Can you imagine your church*
- *deciding to stream those words*
- *across its home page for every*
- *new visitor to see? Jesus just*
- *lost most of us at hello.*

On another occasion when Jesus was surrounded by a throng of eager followers, he turned to them and remarked, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”<sup>5</sup> Can you imagine your church deciding to stream those words across its home page for every new visitor to see? Jesus just lost most of us at hello.

But Jesus had more to say: “Anyone who

does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”<sup>6</sup>

Now this is taking it to another level. *Pick up an instrument of torture and follow me.* This is getting weird...and kind of creepy. Imagine a leader coming on the scene today and inviting all who would come after him to pick up an electric chair and become his disciples. Any takers?

As if this were not enough, Jesus rounded out his seeker-sensitive plea with a pull-at-your-heartstrings conclusion. “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”<sup>7</sup> Give up everything you have, carry a cross, and hate your family. You have to agree, this sounds a lot different than “Admit, believe, confess, and pray a prayer after me.”

Yet one more potential disciple approached Jesus and asked what he needed to

do in order to be a part of Christ's kingdom. This eager seeker was young, rich, intelligent, and influential—a prime prospect for any growing movement.

But what was Jesus' reply? "Sell everything you have and give to the poor.... Then come, follow me."<sup>8</sup>

The man turned away, persuaded that the cost was too high.

Let's put ourselves in the shoes of these followers of Jesus in the first century. What if you were the man Jesus told not to even say good-bye to his family? What if we were told to hate our families and give up everything we had in order to follow Jesus? What if we were told to sell all our possessions in order to give to the poor?

This is where we come face to face with a dangerous reality. We *do* have to give up everything we have to follow Jesus. We *do*

have to love him in a way that makes our closest relationships in this world look like hate. And it is entirely possible that he *will* tell any one of us to sell everything we have and give it to the poor.

But we don't want to believe it.

- *We take the Jesus of the Bible*
- *and begin twisting him into a*
- *version of Jesus that we are*
- *more comfortable with.*

We are afraid of what this might mean for our lives. So we rationalize these passages away. “Jesus wouldn't really tell us not to bury our father or not to say good-bye to our family. Jesus didn't literally mean to sell all we have and give it to the poor. What Jesus really meant was...”

And this is where we need to pause. We



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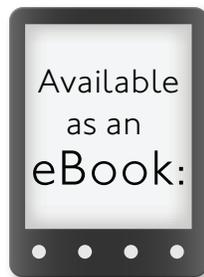
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