

CRAIG
GROESCHEL

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DROP
THE
POSE

Ten Things Christians Think
but Are Afraid to Say

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DARE TO DROP THE POSE
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INTRODUCTION

I Had Been Living a Lie

One Sunday, I stood before my church, filled with fear. Fear that they would think I had failed them as their pastor, that I had let them down. But I was finally ready to tell the truth—I was sure it was what God wanted me to do.

I hadn't had an affair or stolen from the church funds. In fact, my sins were small, everyday things; they were all just hidden from view. From the pews, it looked as if I had become everything and done everything a pastor should—and I worked very hard to keep it that way. I had *played* the part to perfection.

And that was the problem.

I'm going to share the story of an impostor exposed. It's more than the story of one Sunday morning, though. It's about how, over a lifetime, a reasonably well-intentioned follower of

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Jesus can succeed at building an impressive exterior but fail miserably at being the real thing—the person God so lovingly created in the first place.

You may not like me after reading this book. But on the chance God might use my story to help you put down the masks and reclaim the real you, it's a risk I'm willing to take.

FACTORS THAT MADE THE ACTOR

From my earliest childhood memories, I remember “playing the game.” Maybe you played it, too. I'd try to say the right things at the right times to the right people. When the people or circumstances changed, so did I.

As a young child, I tried my best to please my parents. In school I made sure my teachers got my grandest act. There's nothing terribly wrong with that, but looking back, I see that those were just practice runs for what would come later.

As a teenager I did almost anything for acceptance from my buddies. I partied, swore, lied, cheated, and stole. I thought these things would help my popularity. Whether that lifestyle gained me friends is debatable. What it could have cost me in the long run is not. By the time I started college, I was playing so many different roles that I began to lose track of the “real me.” Honestly, I began to wonder if there *was* a real me.

At nineteen I became a follower of Christ. And the parts of my life He changed, He changed miraculously. He cleaned

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house. But in a darkened corner here, a locked closet there, I continued to believe I was better off putting up a front. Except now it was a new front, a spiritual one. It was still the same old game, just played out on a different stage.

Within a few years, I became a pastor. You'd think that becoming "a man of the cloth" (whatever that means) would have shaken the deceit right out of me. But as a young pastor, I simply turned pro. My church members observed my finest performances. And I fooled many of them, but I didn't fool myself...

And I didn't fool God.

I entered seminary *after* I had been a pastor for a while. One of my professors taught me many invaluable ministry principles. In fact, I still practice most of what I learned from him, and I'm eternally grateful for his friendship and leadership. However, one of the things he shared with me I now believe was not only wrong, but incredibly dangerous. He called it the "pastor's mystique." And he told us ministry trainees that we had to guard it at all cost.

"People think they want their pastors to be *normal, everyday people*," he used to tell our class, "but they really don't. They want to see you as superhuman, better than the average person. Church members want to believe your marriage is always strong, your faith never falters, and you are virtually without sin."

I hung on every word, soaking up his advice.

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Week after week, my professor returned to his warnings about a pastor's mystique: "Keep your guard up," he'd say. "Don't let them know the real you. Always dress the part. Always talk the part. You're a pastor now. And you can never let them into your life. Or you'll regret it."

This sounded logical to me. He'd obviously been deeply wounded in his ministry and wanted to help us avoid similar pain. I knew then—and still believe—that he meant well. So I took what he said to heart and continued perfecting my "good pastor" act. I'd smile big at the church members, shake each hand with *both* of mine, and end each conversation with the pastor's best line: "God bless you." Somewhere on my journey, though, I forgot that God called me...not to be *like a pastor*, but to be *like Christ*.

That's when my spiritual struggles started. I wasn't living with gross, unconfessed sin—at least not the kind that gets pastors fired. And my motives weren't bad. I loved Jesus and His people. Every bone in my body desired to make a difference for God in this world. I poured my heart fully into ministry, enduring long hours, boring meetings, grueling classes, temperamental people, and plenty of good, old-fashioned church conflicts—all for Jesus.

After a few years, I became *good* at being a pastor. Ministerial words flowed from my mouth. I learned what to say and what not to say. Weddings were a breeze, and funerals were becoming easier. Preaching came naturally,

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and my counseling skills gradually improved. Most people said I was an “up ‘n’ comer,” the kind of pastor who’d rise quickly through the ranks to a bigger church. From the outside, everything looked good.

But God doesn’t look at the outside.

THE FIRST OF MANY CONFESSIONS

One Sunday, after another week of performing my best for God, I stood to preach His life-changing Word. As I approached the pulpit, the truth hit me squarely between the eyes. I hadn’t prayed at all. Not that day. Not the day before. Not the day before that. To the best of my knowledge, I hadn’t prayed all week.

And I called myself a pastor. That’s when it dawned on me: *I had become a full-time minister and a part-time follower of Christ.* From the outside, I looked the part. “God bless you,” I’d say, followed by the promise, “I’ll be praying for you.”

But that was usually a lie.

Stepping onto the platform to preach that morning, I admitted to myself that I was not a pastor first, but a regular, scared, insecure, everyday guy whose life had been changed by Jesus. And if Jesus really loved me as I was (I knew He did), then why should I go on trying to be someone I wasn’t?

I stumbled through that sermon, forcing the words to come out. The message was superficial, plastic, shallow...but

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somehow I got through it. I drove home that day ashamed of the role I'd played so skillfully, but feeling cautiously hopeful I might learn to be myself.

All week long I agonized. I prayed as I hadn't prayed in months: *God, what if I tell them who I really am? What if they know I'm terrified? What if they reject me? Talk bad about me? Fire me?* I swallowed hard. Then I ventured a step further: *Is this what You want me to do?* I thought I sensed God's assurance, but I wasn't sure. Desperately I hoped it was Him leading me, and not just my own whacked-out thoughts.

The next Sunday arrived, and I walked to the platform uncharacteristically unprepared—not one written note. The only preparation was in my heart. My throat dry, nervous beyond description, I stared at two hundred very committed churchgoers. They stared politely back.

Silence.

Finally I spoke. "My relationship with God is not what it should be." My voice quavered with each syllable. No one moved. I plunged ahead. "I've confessed to God, but now I'm going to confess to you: I've become a full-time minister but a part-time follower of Christ."

You could have heard a communion wafer snap.

I continued speaking, opening my heart and inviting everyone inside. The message that Sunday was unembellished: no humor, no quotes, no poems. It was void of clever sayings or points starting with the same letter. But the message was

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true. I held nothing back. It was the biggest public risk I'd ever taken. It was also my first *authentic* sermon. I had preached many times before, but this was the first time the real me made a showing. In the middle of my talk, something started to happen, something new...

God made Himself known.

The reality of His presence is hard to describe, but it's even harder to miss. Some people cried quietly in their seats. Others sobbed openly—not so much for my sins, but for their own. Before I had finished my confession, many gathered at the altar to repent along with me.

As the tears and words flowed, God's peace replaced my fear. His assurance pushed away my doubts. Christ's power invaded my weakness. In that moment, Jesus became as real to me as He had ever been. The Savior was with me...and I believed He was pleased. "Well done," I felt, more than heard.

That's when it all changed. I became a full-time follower of Christ who happened to be a pastor. No more make-believe. No posing. And no playing games. From that moment on, I would be who I am.

Or nothing at all.

LEAP OF FAITH

Why would you want to read a book about a pastor's confessions? Maybe you don't. But then again, maybe if you give

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Him a chance, God will do something in you that you didn't expect. Like He did for me.

Be honest with yourself. Are you tired of pretending? Living to please others? Acting a part? Doing everything to cover up who you really are? Stop hiding.

Be who God called you to be. Live for an audience of ONE.

Am I saying you have to confess all your garbage in front of a whole church? No. With some issues, that might be what God requires of you. But with more personal matters, it'll be wiser to divulge them only to a small, trusted circle of friends or a lone accountability partner. But playing the fugitive from truth will never bring you peace.

The problem is that it's easier to stay the way you are—to coast and live an average, complacent life. You could avoid risk and keep acting. That's what most people do. In fact, you'll often be rewarded for faking it. No one will complain. The status quo is always comfortable. You'll blend in. Even though you know you were created to stand out.

But if you're sick of shallow, empty relationships—if you're craving deep, sincere community—then you're going to have to take a chance. You'll risk harsh judgments, misunderstandings, criticism. But think about the reward. Imagine living in the freedom and holiness of God. Dream about releasing guilt, shame, fear, and doubts. See yourself closer to God—and the people around you—than you've ever been before.

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The choice is yours: Life as it has been, or life as it could become.

It is my goal to live the most authentic, transparent, vulnerable life a Christ follower can. And here is what I've found: Some people don't like me. But that would be the case no matter what, wouldn't it? On the other hand, others not only like me, they love me deeply. And they don't love the image I once portrayed. They love the *real* me who God created. And I love them.

The more honest I have become with God, myself, and His people, the richer and deeper my relationships have grown. Before, I was always afraid of being found out. I lived in constant fear of exposure—but not anymore. I overcame my fear because I took a chance. And I'll continue to take obedient, truthful chances.

This book is all about risks. As you turn each page, you'll likely experience new discomforts. This road of honesty is the path I chose to take. I won't play it safe. And neither should you. In fact, *you can't play it safe and please God*. The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6).

Even when our faith is small, God can do great things. I pray that my confessions will help you take that first step toward living a life free of fear...and secrets...and doubts...and insecurities. A life of honesty. A life that pleases God. The life you were created to live.

I Can't Stand a Lot of Christians

I love Christ. It's His followers who make me crazy. Truth is, I dislike a lot of Christians. Notice I didn't say *some* Christians, but *a lot* of them. I don't like them—not at all, not even a little bit. Many times I'd rather hang around wild, swearing, heathen, lost people than self-righteous, hyper-critical, narrow-minded, so-called believers.

I relate a lot to a certain pastor of a large church. He once told a reporter in an interview that he prays for six hours a day. Astonished, the reporter asked why he prays so long. The pastor replied honestly, "My church is very large—and there are so many people that I hate—I have to pray six hours to help me love them."

I wish I liked all Christians, but I don't. Here's the short list of reasons why. I dislike many Christians because they can be so darned judgmental. They act holier-than-thou, and

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they can be incredibly condescending. They'll fight and argue about the dumbest things.

You're reading the wrong Bible version.

Your church has the wrong worship style.

You don't teach enough from the Old Testament.

Why don't you do more expository preaching?

Your church isn't evangelistic enough.

You are too evangelistic, and you don't do enough discipleship.

These "church experts" are often the ones who don't know their own lost next-door neighbor's name! Aaaaauuggghhhh! It makes me sick. Then when you get outside of church issues, it's even more fun:

*All R-rated movies are off-limits. (I loved it when *The Passion of the Christ* came out.)*

If you listen to secular music, you're of the devil.

Don't get a tattoo.

Don't watch Teletubbies.

Don't go to Disney World.

I can't picture Jesus drawing these lines in the sand.

Another guy who turns my stomach is Angry Street Preacher: *Turn or burn! You're going to hell, you sinner!* In my own experience, Angry Street Preacher is often sinning as much as or more than any of the passersby he's shouting at.

If my previous rant wasn't enough, to top it off, Christians can be just plain weird—*really* weird. Take Christian television. Some of those people make my job almost impossible. If even

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I—supposedly on the same team with them—am tempted to make fun of their goofiness, is it any wonder that non-Christians watch them just for laughs? I know some very valuable Christian ministries are on television, and I'm all for them, but you have to admit, there's some out-and-out flaky stuff.

If you're offended, be honest for a moment. Have you seen the way many of the televangelists dress? Add to it their overly made-up wives' long eyelashes and Pepto-Bismol-colored hair. They look like a pimp and his bimbo—and even the real pimp and the real bimbo would call it bad taste. Not to mention the unbiblical, self-centered, God-is-going-to-make-me-rich-so-I-can-drive-a-Rolls-Royce crap.

Then they top it off with that phony, insincere, I'm-going-to-get-your-money way of preaching, adding an “-uh!” to the end of every sentence. “And...Jesus rose from the grave-uh! And He will forgive your sins-uh! Call on Him now-uh!”

WHAT'S THAT?

It makes me want to puke-uh!

Probably the worst, though, is that Christians can be so stinking hypocritical. They'll say one thing and do another. Not only does that tarnish Jesus' name, but it gives the skeptical, nonbelieving world more ammunition to use against the body of Christ.

It's like the guy who went to the Baptist pastor and said, “Brother Smith, would you perform a funeral for my dead dog?”

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Brother Smith replied, “We don’t do funerals for dogs.”

“Oh,” the man replied, seeming disappointed, but inwardly smiling. “I was going to give \$100,000 to the church. I guess I’ll have to give it to the Methodists.”

“Wait a minute!” Brother Smith quickly replied. “Why didn’t you *say* your dog was a Baptist?”

Those are a few of the reasons I dislike a lot of Christians. To be fair, a lot of them don’t like me, either. I’m too radical. I have shallow theology. I’m too good at marketing. And my unpardonable sin: I pastor a “megachurch” (which automatically makes me an egomaniac who only cares about money).

Now that that’s on the table, we can start, and hopefully we can get somewhere God wants us to be—which is probably not where I am right now. Just the same, I feel better after venting.

Thanks for listening.

THE CHRISTIAN I DISLIKE THE MOST

If you think I only dislike Christians from other churches, think again. As I look at my own church, I see a lot of people I also don’t like. I despise what they stand for and how they live. It embarrasses me—makes me sick.

One Christian stands out in my mind as the absolute worst. This guy bothers me the most. Keeps me up at night. Makes my stomach churn. The Christian I detest the most is...

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Me.

I'm not kidding. I hate so much about myself. I hate when I'm less than Christ would want me to be. I despise myself when I say things I shouldn't say and things that are inconsistent with God's Word. I hate when, as a leader, I make decisions that hurt people. I hate when my sinful actions hurt Christ followers and turn away nonbelievers. With everything in me, I hate these things about myself.

My wife would chime in here and say, "Craig, you're being way too hard on yourself." She'd be right. Yes, I'm growing, and part of my growth is learning to accept myself as Christ accepts me—but I can accept myself while still hating my screwups. Those still happen way too often.

I don't like a lot of Christians—and my name often tops that list. But while I despise my own sinful actions the most, it's so much easier to point my finger at others. When I take a gut-honest look at this contradiction inside me, it shows me exactly what I need to do about it. Instead of following my instinctive course of self-defense and outward criticism, I here and now commit to laying my heart bare before God. I ask Him to cleanse *me*. Change *me*. Work in *me*.

Rather than complaining about inconsequential little irritations, I'm asking God to get right to the root of the problem, to eradicate the dry rot and fix the cracks in my foundation. I need Him to show me how to love Him and how to love His people. Even the ones I don't like—even myself.

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God, make me different.

That's exactly what He's doing. Through the rest of this chapter, I'll show you how God is renovating me from the inside out. I challenge you to come along with me, not just saying, "Yeah, Groeschel, you really need to change," but telling yourself, "I need to change, too."

I'm still a beginner at this, but I'm slowly getting better. I've discovered a surprising bonus that comes with letting God change me: As God continues to stretch me, I'm learning to like—or at least tolerate—other Christians who I used to hate! When God changes me, He also changes the way I see others. (I can even watch a whole program on BPC—the Bad Preaching Channel—without throwing something at the TV.)

Let's examine some areas in our lives that God wants to make different...

DIFFERENT? PROVE IT!

We must become different in our *actions*.

First Peter 1:14–15 says, "Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do." So, instead of wearing the "sin police" badge, looking for faults in others, my full-time job should be submitting to the Spirit's work in my own life—becoming *holy*.

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That sounds awfully intimidating to me, so let's talk about "holy." What does that mean? I'll give you a hint: It has nothing to do with your threadbare socks. In the Bible, the English word "holy" comes from the Greek and Hebrew words that mean "sacred," "consecrated," or "set apart for a special purpose." If a thing or a person is "set apart" from anything that might contaminate it, it's also "pure," another implication of holiness.

As I love God and surrender all my heart to Him, His Spirit makes me pure, different, set apart from the darkness of this world. Unfortunately, if "holy" means "set apart," the scary truth is...I don't always behave that differently from nonbelievers. Do you?

Examine your life honestly, without pretense. Don't play games. In the way you behave, are you sincerely different from your nonbelieving neighbors? Or the people at your office? Are you different in your attitudes? Your parenting? How you handle money? Is your marriage different? Are your friendships? Your morals?

If you can honestly say *yes*, then congratulations. Some Christians do live mostly holy lives. But most Christians would have to say, *I am not different enough. I'm not living purely, empowered by Christ. I'm very much like the rest of the world.*

How can I make such a bold and sweeping statement? It's not just based on my opinions. It's also supported by the well-respected research of pollster George Barna. Barna did

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a study¹ to discover just how different Christians are from non-Christians. His research was much more extensive than the small sampling of findings I'll share, but here are a few of his discoveries:

The first has to do with serving. Who serves more—Christians or non-Christians? If you guessed that Christians are more likely to volunteer their time to help others (including serving at their local church), you're right. Twenty-seven percent of non-Christians give their time to nonprofit causes in an average month, compared with 29 percent of believers. Christians outshined nonbelievers in serving by a whopping 2 percent! Not exactly a convincing difference.

How about donating to charitable groups? Christians are surely much more generous, right? Actually, wrong. Forty-eight percent of non-Christians said they gave in the last month, compared to only 47 percent of Christians.

Did you catch that? Non-Christians are more generous than believers! Let's stop for a moment. What else does that staggering statistic tell us? If 47 percent of believers gave, that means 53 percent didn't. *Over half of American Christ followers didn't give any money to missions, to their church, or to the poor.* This is a colossal tragedy.

Shall we continue?

Did you know that in the year the study was conducted, 10 percent more non-Christians gave to the poor than did believers? Shocking. Did you know that exactly the same pro-

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portion of believers as nonbelievers (36 percent) read their horoscopes? (Oh, you're a Leo? It's a great day to fall in love or buy a goldfish.)

Get this one: Twenty-seven percent of born-again adults have been divorced, compared to 23 percent of non-born-again adults. It seems that more people who promised *God* not to get divorced ended their marriages than those married by the justice of the peace.

God calls us to be different. Sometimes we are...in the wrong ways.

God, make us different in our actions.

MORE THAN A HINT AT THE MALL

When I ask God to change *my* actions, that honesty about my own inconsistent behaviors forces me not to be so hard on other believers. Humble acknowledgement of the plank in my own eye gives me more patience with the specks in everyone else's (see Matthew 7:1–5). Instead of pointing the finger at others, let's allow God to examine us.

Measure your actions in light of Scripture. "Among you there must not be *even a hint of sexual immorality*, or of any kind of *impurity*, or of *greed*, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be *obscenity, foolish talk* or *coarse joking*" (Ephesians 5:3–4, emphasis mine).

Ask yourself: *In the past week, did I have even a hint of sexual*

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immorality? Did I think an impure thought, read something inappropriate? (You might be surprised what God would call inappropriate.) Did I look longingly at an attractive person who is not my spouse? Or much worse? Did I experience any kind of impurity? Greed? Obscenity? Foolish talk? Coarse joking? God calls you to be holy, different, set apart, pure. Are you?

I had an unusual experience at the mall. I circled the lot several times, unwilling to settle for a bad parking space. As my family grew impatient, suddenly the Lord provided!

The space was very close to the best mall entrance. Driving the correct direction down the lane (and enjoying my sense of moral superiority over those who didn't), I made "eye-lock" with the Chosen Spot. If you don't know what eye-lock is, it's similar to calling "shotgun." By staring at the parking space without looking away, I created an invisible force field around it. I wrapped it in imaginary yellow tape with the word "MINE" printed boldly on it over and over. The parking space was set apart for me: "Holy unto Craig."

Now, when Person A makes eye-lock on a parking spot, it's a major breach of ethics for Persons B, C, D, E, or F to take that spot. (If I were writing the laws, it would be a crime punishable by jail time.)

Just as I pulled up, a small sports car whipped up (driving the wrong way down the lane), broke through my eye-lock force field, and *stole my space*.

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I snapped. I backed up my oversized, gas-guzzling SUV (capacity eight), pointed it toward the enemy's sports car, shifted to neutral, and revved my engine: *Vrrrooom. Vrrrooom.* Then I shifted to drive, floored it, and sped directly toward his bumper.

My kids prayed aloud. My wife screamed. A split second before impact, I slammed on the brakes, screeching to a halt inches away from the other car's bumper. Then I just stared hatefully in the other driver's direction: Pastor Craig at his best.

Eventually I calmed down. I parked in an incredibly bad spot and walked into the mall with my family. Inside JCPenney, the driver of the sports car spotted me. I could tell he was sincere when he said, "Man, I'm sorry I took your spot." My wife giggled behind me.

I pondered educating him about his breach of etiquette, pontificating eloquently on the evil. I wanted to expound on the eternal consequences of shattering the eye-lock force field. He looked at me earnestly and said calmly, "It looks like you have a problem with anger. Did you know Jesus loves you?" He next proceeded to witness to me sweetly.

Did I mention that I hate the way I act?

God, make my actions different. Help me be set apart, pure, holy.

And as God makes me more like Christ, it's amazing how much more I'm willing to accept and love His flawed followers—including myself.

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ME FIRST

My parking-lot debacle brings up another way I need to change. Not only do my actions need the cleansing power of the Spirit of God, but so do my *attitudes*. I tend to accuse others, while at the same time excusing myself. If someone does something remotely wrong, I'm quick to point the finger, but if *I* do something wrong, I'm quick to justify. While I judge someone else by their actions, I judge myself by my intentions.

That's wrong.

Paul said in Philippians 2:5 that my "attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." And just what *is* that attitude? "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (vv. 3–4). Notice that this passage tells us to do *nothing* out of selfish ambition—nothing. Zero. Zilch. Nada.

Yet, most of what I do is motivated by selfish ambition.

What am I gonna get out of this? What's in it for me? Will it be fun? Will I gain something? If not, count me out.

God raises the bar: I should put the interests of others ahead of my own. Easier said than done.

God, change my attitude about others.

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I have a few really good friends. These great men of God would all probably take a bullet for me. One in particular is my accountability partner and close friend. John has stood by me for years. Our friendship is as good as they get.

One day we were looking at a home he was considering purchasing. We walked around the house to examine the backyard. Suddenly two man-eating dogs—a large Doberman and a ferocious Chow—charged right toward us.

Thinking only of my own safety, I pushed off from my longtime friend to gain momentum in the other direction. The unintended consequence was that I also pushed him directly toward the attacking dogs. He fell over. I ran to safety. (Some obscure, primal instinct—which fortunately only emerges in response to large doses of adrenaline—realized that I couldn't outrun the dogs...but if I outran my buddy, I'd be fine.)

Thankfully, a fence separated the dogs from us. Still, I had to deal with the reality of my actions—I had put my own safety ahead of my buddy's. To save my rear end, I pushed him toward potential disaster. John still harasses me about it.

Although I'd never intentionally harm someone, my nature is dangerously selfish and self-centered, and my self-focus can harm others just as easily as if I had acted with deliberate malice.

God, help me to put others ahead of myself. Change my attitude.

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ONE OF THESE THINGS IS
NOT LIKE THE OTHER

What about you? Do you care about others? Really care?

It's easier to shoot the wounded than it is to help them heal. It's more fun to judge someone's sin than to gain understanding of the pain and confusion that lies behind it. Criticizing comes more naturally than listening, more than loving. In particular, how would you honestly evaluate your attitude toward people who don't know Christ?

God, help me to love the lost as You love them.

Personally, I think a lot of non-Christians act more Christlike than Christians. Let me give you a couple of contrasting examples:

Once, a guy in his early twenties knocked on my door to share his faith with me. Although I thought that was pretty cool, I interrupted him and told him I was already a disciple of Christ. Not knowing what I did for a living, he asked me where I went to church. When I told him, he confided in me that his pastor warned him not to go to *that* church...because the pastor didn't preach the truth.

Ouch.

Now I certainly don't believe our church is right for everyone, but it would be nice if Christians didn't tear each other down. That other pastor's never met me, nor has he been to our church, yet he criticizes me openly.

I CAN'T STAND A LOT OF CHRISTIANS

Contrast him with Anthony...a waiter at one of my favorite restaurants. Every time I eat there, I always request him. He's admittedly a wild man, and he seems to be far from Christ. But he's loyal, honest, trustworthy. Most of all, Anthony is my friend.

Even though Anthony knows I'm a pastor, swearing freely around me doesn't seem to be much of an issue for him. Anthony's language is similar to what you'll hear in an episode of *The Sopranos*. F-bombs fly from his mouth without restraint—and that's just his warm-up. Honestly, I like that about him. Anthony is simply himself: no airs, no pretense, no hypocrisy. I'd rather hang out with a nonbeliever who is himself than a Christ follower putting on a show.

Anthony told me about a group of restaurant patrons who were making fun of megachurch pastors, and my name came up. Anthony almost foamed at the mouth as he recounted what he had said to them:

"Guys, you don't know Craig like I do. You're full of *#@&! You need to shut the #@!% up!"

Did I mention Anthony is my friend?

What about you? So many self-centered and self-righteous believers judge those who don't know Christ:

His profanity bothers me.

They're shacking up.

Can you believe the trashy way that wild, sinful, Jezebel-spirited floozy dresses?

DARE TO DROP THE POSE

If these people don't know Christ, why should they be judged by His standards? How would Jesus treat such a person? With His best love. If you find yourself looking down on those who haven't fully submitted to His grace, pray:

God, change my attitude about the lost.

RESCUE THE RESCUERS?

God, change my attitude about Your church—especially my role in it.

Something just happened that made me stop and think. I was sitting in my office, typing away, when Package Delivery Guy dropped off a package. (I know his name, but I'm guarding his anonymity.) I like this guy a lot. I see him often, and he's really cool, but he just said something that makes my skin crawl.

Package Delivery Guy told me, "I finally found me a good church." (This is after several years of church hopping and shopping.) "All the other ones didn't meet my needs, but this one does."

Why would I shudder at that statement? Think about it. I've heard it hundreds of times: *I'm looking for a church that meets my needs.*

Can you admit for a moment how incredibly unbiblical that statement is? When did we, as Christ followers, start to think that the church exists for us? When did we forget that *we are the church?* And that we're here *for the world?*

I CAN'T STAND A LOT OF CHRISTIANS

Before I was a pastor, I used to think that church should serve me, until I let God change my attitude. I was a taker, not a giver. I wanted a church that would provide what I needed. I was the spiritual consumer—an observer, not a participant.

If that's you, let me encourage you to stop observing and get in the game. Reach out. Use your gifts. Give recklessly. Serve passionately. *Make a difference.* Love those whom others reject, even those who aren't like us—*especially* those who aren't like us. Love not only nonbelievers, but also “second-class Christians.” Jesus did; so should we.

One time I preached at a small country church. The volunteer receptionist told me we'd be having a guest that day. (Someone had called to find out what time the service started.) I was greeting people at the front door, and sure enough, I saw the first-time guest. She was easy to spot because her clothes were not “church clothes.” This apparent single mom walked nervously toward the church, Bible in hand, obviously intimidated. Suddenly one of the deacons walked up to her and told her that her clothes were unacceptable for Sunday worship. Downcast, the woman left.

Rejected...by the very people who claim to represent Christ.

God must have been crushed, furious—probably both. Yet, how often do we see God's people acting in similar ways? Prejudice is the exact opposite of what Christ calls us to: serving others. Prejudice rejects someone because of skin color,

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or lack of education, or the part of town the person lives in. Prejudice discriminates based on denominational backgrounds, worship preferences, and income levels.

It *must* stop.

The church is not here for us. We *are* the church, and we are here *for the world*. When I ask church people to serve somewhere, I often receive a polite, “I’ll pray about it, Pastor.” (Which generally means, “Oh, crap. I don’t want to do that, but I’ll say something spiritual that may buy me time to plan my excuse.”)

I love the story about the guy who waited patiently in line to greet his pastor one Sunday after the sermon. “Pastor,” this eager, sincere Christ follower said, “I have only one thing to tell you. My answer is yes. Now, what’s the question?”

The pastor looked at him, confused, and, smiling awkwardly, fell back upon the pastor’s safety net: “God bless you.” The pastor politely brushed the man off and turned to greet the next parishioner.

The next week, the same guy waited in line and repeated the same words. “Pastor, my answer is yes. Now what’s the question?”

The pastor pondered this enigma. Wanting to get to the bottom of it, he invited the young man to lunch. Over a midweek meal, the young man once again blurted out the intriguing mantra: “Pastor, my answer is yes. Now what’s the question?”

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Finally overcome with curiosity, the pastor asked, “Can you please tell me what you mean by that?”

The young man smiled and, with passion, began, “Pastor, I was hooked on everything bad, about to lose my family, sliding down a slippery slope toward certain destruction. Then Jesus intervened.” Tears welled up in his eyes. “Because of what Jesus did for me, my answer to you is yes. You are my pastor, and I’ll do whatever you need.

“If you want me to rock babies, I’ll rock babies. If you want me to usher, I’ll usher. If you want me to mow the churchyard, I’ll be there at 6 a.m. every Saturday. My answer to you will always be yes. Now, what’s the question?”

When it comes to your church (assuming you have one), what’s your answer? Is it, *I’ll pray about it*, while you look for an escape? Or is it...

Yes?

LOVIN’ IT!

So, enough about what I don’t like about Christians (myself included). Let me tell you what I *do* like—in fact, what I *love*.

I love my weekly small-group Bible study. These are some of the best people I know. They’re imperfect and they’re real. The other night, one guy whom we all respect talked about his problem with lust. I admire him for that. God is changing him. I love that a lot. I love the anonymous person who

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brought me a tin of chocolate chip cookies—just to brighten my day. I love that people donate to Christian radio and to third-world countries, to send teenagers to camp and to help hurricane victims. I love it when Christ followers sacrifice—when they give up something they love for something they love even more.

I love when God's people pray...and when He answers. I love when people use their spiritual gifts, and when they make a difference. I love to see Christ's servants blown away by the way God's using them.

I love when people "get it"—when they start to understand God's grace, and they can't help talking about it. I love when imperfect people run up against a perfect God...and God wins.