

SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE



SNEAK
PEEK



SAMPLE
ONLY

A Call to Make Your Life Count
in a World of Urgent Need

DAVID PLATT

New York Times Best-Selling Author of *Radical*

Praise for
Something Needs to Change

“Rugged. Authentic. Gritty. Real. Worshipful. There are no other books like this one. I always pick up David’s books with a sense of excitement and, quite honestly, apprehension—because I know that areas of compromise and complacency in my life are going to be exposed. But this book exceeded even my high expectations, for which I am grateful. And so will you be. As David writes, it’s time to run, not walk. Let’s go.”

—J. D. GREER, president of the Southern Baptist
Convention

“Extraordinary and challenging. I’ve just never read a book like this before. I am so moved. Bring your full heart to this story and watch how God opens your eyes, changes your mind, and broadens the dreams you have for your life.”

—ANNIE F. DOWNS, best-selling author of *100 Days
to Brave and Remember God*

“If you dare to read this book, you might just have an unexpected encounter with Jesus that leaves you weeping on the floor, as David’s experience did. Something changes within us when the seemingly overwhelming needs of the world present themselves simply in the life of a single person. Ultimately, I pray your compassion will be transformed to action.”

—SANTIAGO “JIMMY” MELLADO, president and CEO
of Compassion International

“Grippingly vulnerable, humble, and unforgettable, this book holds the catalytic power for life change. Platt leads you on an astonishingly transparent interior journey of his heart and mind, demonstrating transformative, cruciform discipleship in real time.”

—ANN VOSKAMP, author of the *New York Times* bestsellers
The Broken Way and *One Thousand Gifts*

“I wholeheartedly recommend *Something Needs to Change*. God spoke to me through it, and that’s the best I can say about any book.”

—RANDY ALCORN, founder of Eternal Perspective Ministries
and author of *If God Is Good*

“Riveting. Wrecking. Raw. *Something Needs to Change* is a harrowing physical and spiritual journey through areas of deep need, tenuous terrain, and spiritual oppression, as well as a beautiful, hope-filled invitation to come penetrate the present darkness with the light of Christ. This resource will reawaken your faith, reorient you to the calling of Christ, and remind you of the importance and value of your role in God’s redemption story.”

—LOUIE GIGLIO, pastor of Passion City Church, founder
of Passion Conferences, and author of *Not Forsaken*

“*Something Needs to Change* will bring you to a crossroads in your faith: Who and what are you living for? If heaven and hell are real and there are billions of people who don’t know Jesus, then what are you going to do about it? Prepare to be challenged.”

—JENNIE ALLEN, author of *Nothing to Prove* and founder
of IF:Gathering

“Few of us will trek the Himalayas, let alone face the type of suffering and need that people experience daily in that region and around the world. In *Something Needs to Change*, David Platt serves all of us by exposing us to the stories and lives of those he encountered during his personal journey through this mountainous region. We all want our lives to count, and Platt helps guide us toward a vision for just that.”

—TRILLIA NEWBELL, author of *Sacred Endurance, Enjoy*,
and the children’s book *God’s Very Good Idea*

“The message of David Platt’s new book, *Something Needs to Change*, could not be more timely. I have witnessed the kind of heartbreaking situations David describes, and I agree with him that what needs to change to address such suffering is *us*. It is only when we yield to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in us—to make us more like Jesus—that we can participate in the transformation God is doing around the world. I know personally how much joy can be found in allowing Christ to work in and through me this way. Read this book, join the journey, and be open to the change God wants to do in you!”

—EDGAR SANDOVAL SR., president of World Vision U.S.

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*New York Times Best-Selling Author of **Radical***

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in a World of Urgent Need**



MULTNOMAH

SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE

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To “Aaron” and all those he represents.

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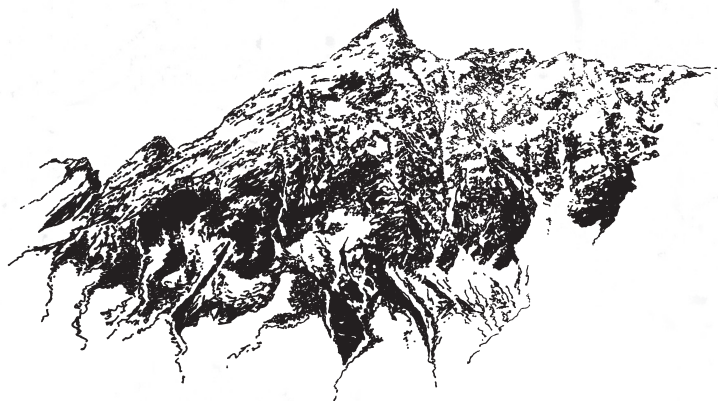
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Author's Note

In some parts of the world, following Jesus is a dangerous business. The trek described in these pages details events seen and heard through multiple trips on Himalayan trails, where the gospel is not always welcome. Everything and everyone described in this book is real, but for security reasons, key names, places, times, and other details have been altered to protect the people involved.

Why the Tears?



A lone in a guesthouse at the base of the Himalayas, I found myself on my knees, face to the floor, sobbing. Scattered around me was the evidence of my past week—a backpack, trekking poles, hiking boots. I was fresh off a weeklong journey through some of the highest mountains in the world and only hours from a flight home to the States.

But I hadn't planned on ending my trip with out-of-control tears.

Up to that day, I could count on one hand the number of times I'd cried in my adult life. The last time I'd wept was the day I received the phone call that my dad had died of a sudden heart attack. But this day in an Asian guesthouse was different. This time I wasn't weeping because *I* was missing someone or even something. Instead, I was crying uncontrollably because of what

others—men, women, and children I’d met the past week—were missing. Things like water, food, family members . . . freedom and hope. I so longed for them to have these things that I couldn’t help it. I fell to the floor sobbing, and the flood of tears wouldn’t stop.

What We Need

Looking back on that day in the guesthouse, I wonder why being so overwhelmed for others in need has been uncommon for me. I think of all the church services I’ve been in week after week, year after year, talking and hearing about the needs of people all over the world. I think of all the sermons I’ve preached about serving those in need. I even think about the books I’ve written, including *Radical*—for crying out loud—a book about laying down our lives in love for Christ and the world around us. So why has it been rare for me to be so moved by the needs of others that I have fallen on my face before God and wept?

I don’t think this question is just for me. When I think of all those church services, I recall very few instances when other Christians and I have wept together for people who were missing water, food, family, freedom, or hope. Why is a scene like that so uncommon among us?

It makes me wonder if we’ve lost our capacity to weep. It makes me wonder if we have subtly, dangerously, and almost unknowingly guarded our lives, our families, and even our churches from truly being affected by God’s words to us in a world of urgent spiritual and physical needs around us. We talk a lot about the need to *know* what we believe in our heads, yet I wonder if we

have forgotten to *feel* what we believe in our hearts. How else are we to explain our ability to sit in services where we sing songs and hear sermons celebrating how Jesus is the hope of the world, yet rarely (if ever) fall on our faces weeping for those who don't have this hope and then take action to make this hope known to them?

Why today do we seem to be so far from the way of Jesus? Jesus wept over those in need. He was moved with compassion for the crowds. He lived and loved to bring healing and comfort to the broken. He died for the sins of the world. So why are those of us who carry his Spirit not moved and compelled in the same way? Surely God didn't design the gospel of Jesus to be confined to our minds and mouths in the church, yet disconnected from our emotions and actions in the world.

Surely something needs to change.

But how? When I found myself face first on that guesthouse floor, it wasn't because I'd heard a new fact about suffering in the world or even made a new discovery in God's Word. On the long flight to Asia, I had actually written an entire sermon on poverty and oppression, complete with staggering numbers concerning the poor and oppressed in the world today. And I had written it from an emotionally well-guarded, frighteningly coldhearted perspective. Somehow, staring at statistics on poverty and even studying the Bible had left my soul unscathed. But when I came face to face with men, women, and children in urgent spiritual and physical need, the wall in my heart was breached. And I wept.

Clearly, the change we need won't happen simply by our seeing more facts or listening to more sermons (or even preaching them, for that matter). What we need is not an explanation of the

Word and the world that puts more information in our heads; we need an experience with the Word *in the world* that penetrates the recesses of our hearts. We need to dare to come face to face with desperate need in the world around us and ask God to do a work deep within us that we could never manufacture, manipulate, or make happen on our own.

This is my prayer for the pages ahead.

A Risk

I've taken a different approach in writing this book. I'm most naturally a preacher who makes use of exposition and explanation to communicate his points. But as I've mentioned, I don't think we need more exposition and explanation. I think we need an experience—an encounter that takes exposed and explained truth to a deeper level in our hearts than it would ever go otherwise.

So in this book I want to take off my preacher hat and invite you to experience a trek with me through some of the highest mountains of Asia. I invite you to eat what I ate, drink what I drank, see the faces I saw, touch the people I touched, and, in all of this, feel the emotions I felt. In the end, I want to consider with you how to transfer this trek through the Himalayas into everyday life where we live. I want to imagine with you what might happen if we let the gospel penetrate beyond our heads to our hearts in a way that dramatically changes the course of our lives, families, and churches in the world.

I believe that in using my mountain trek as the setting for this book, there's risk involved—for both you and me. For me the risk

is leaving the security of the platform where I normally preach, and even coming out from behind the desk where I normally write, to share some struggles I have with things I preach and truths I believe. By inviting you on these trails, I want to open my personal thoughts to you, and I don't want to hide my most profound questions from you.

For example, if the gospel is really true and God is really good, then where are the truth and goodness of God amid extreme poverty and pain? And where are his peace and protection for the oppressed and exploited?

And what of life beyond this world? In a universe governed by a good God, is hell really a place and does it actually last forever? If it really exists and really won't end, then why are so many people born into an earthly hell only to move on to an eternal one? And will billions of individuals who don't believe in Jesus really go there, even if they never had a chance to hear about him?

It may surprise you to find that even a pastor like me, who absolutely believes in the truth and reliability of Scripture, still wrestles with questions like these. I do. And I know it's one thing to ask these questions behind a podium in a comfortable building on a Sunday morning, but a whole other thing to ask these questions when you're standing on a mountainside with a man whose wife and kids died in a matter of hours of a preventable disease because no medicine was available. Or when you're looking into the face of a twelve-year-old girl who wants sex with you, because that's what she was sold and enslaved to do since she was ten. Or when you're watching a body physically burn on a funeral pyre and you know that person never even heard of Jesus.

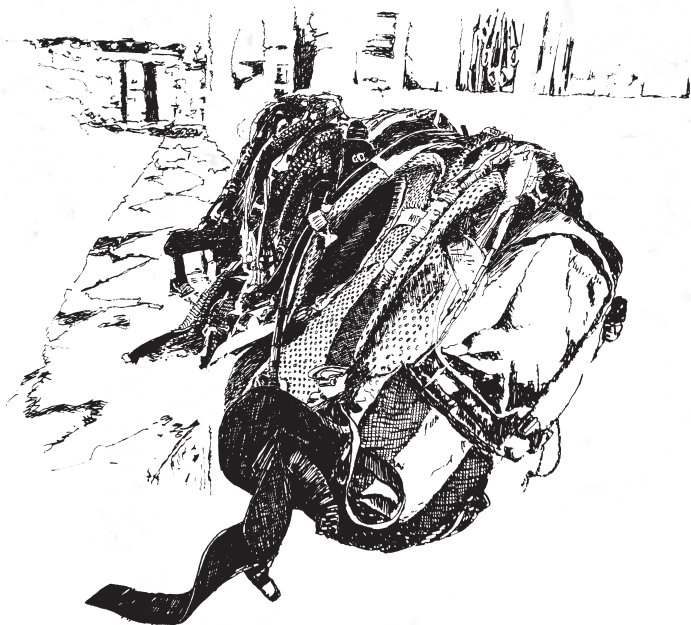
I want to take a risk in sharing a more behind-the-scenes look into what happens when a preacher and author with three seminary degrees has his deepest convictions rocked by darkness in the world around him and finds himself asking honestly, *Is Jesus really the hope of the world after all?*

I believe there's risk here for you, too. Now, just so you know, I am saving you a lot of risk by writing this book. You don't have to risk flying on a helicopter into a remote part of the world where if something bad happens to you, you're virtually disconnected from outside communication and days away from getting any help. I'm saving you the risk of crossing suspended bridges and hiking narrow trails where one slip might mean tumbling to your death. You don't have to worry about altitude sickness, amebic dysentery, traveler's diarrhea, cyclospora, giardia, malaria, hepatitis, or . . . I think you get the point. Suffice to say that "you're welcome" for saving you from all these risks!

But you can't avoid all risk by joining me on this trek. I had no idea what would happen in my life after a week on those trails. So by inviting you to come with me into these mountains, I'm asking you to open yourself to the possibility that the way you view your life, your family, your church, or your future might not be the same when you return. I don't know if you'll find yourself on the floor weeping uncontrollably. But I do hope that you'll find yourself unguarded. Unfiltered. And ultimately open to a whole new world of what God wants to do in and through your life.

So if you're up for that journey, I invite you to turn the page. Because something needs to change.

Preparation



Even a short trip into the Himalayas takes preparation. A small team and I would be hiking through mountain trails at elevations higher than any of us had ever experienced (unless flying in a plane). Almost unimaginably, more than one hundred peaks in the Himalayas soar above twenty-four thousand feet. This mountain range spans five different countries—Nepal, India, Bhutan, China, and Pakistan—six if you count Tibet.

I knew the trip would be physically demanding, so I trained

by doing CrossFit, walking on an incline treadmill every morning for months, and hiking to the crest of the highest mountain near me. Unfortunately, that mountain soared a mere thousand feet above sea level. That's not even a hill in the Himalayas.

In addition to physical training, packing for the trek required careful planning. Each member of the team would need to carry all his own gear—that is, no assistance from Sherpas or yaks. So the goal was to hold the weight of all our clothing and miscellaneous gear to no more than twenty pounds. Since at the highest elevation we would sleep with temperatures well below freezing, this meant toting a down sleeping bag rated to fifteen degrees.

Also going in the backpack:

- a change of clothes for midway through the trek
- a small towel and minimal toiletries
- a hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses for daytime hiking
- a headlamp for hiking at night
- a filtered water bottle
- snacks (not a lot of vending machines along the trail)
- a Bible and a journal

Backstory

Just how did I end up on this trek? Primarily, it was because of a meeting one day with a guy named Aaron who is now a good friend of mine.

I first met Aaron when he visited the church where I was the pastor. He introduced himself to me after a worship service and told me he lived in Asia, but that was all. I didn't see him again

for a couple more years. During those years, God led my wife, Heather, and me to pursue adopting a child from the same country where Aaron lives. We had heard about living conditions there for many children, including young girls who were enslaved for sex, so we decided to bring one of these children into our family.

We started the adoption process, and night after night, Heather and I gathered together with our two boys at the time and prayed for their little sister-to-be. Everything went smoothly, and our next step was to be matched with a specific little girl. Then, without warning, this country closed down adoption for foreigners. Our hearts were devastated.

That Christmas was a sad one for us, so I wrote a poem for Heather, my attempt to express the heaviness we both felt. I detailed all the struggles we had been through, the deep longings we had experienced to have this special girl be part of our family. Expressing these feelings in the voice of the child we'd never meet, I ended the poem with these lines:

So let love hope and let love plead,
To God on behalf of a prospective little daughter-to-be.
And regardless of whether or not my parents one day
you'll be,
Please promise that your family will never stop praying
for me.

This country remained closed, but Heather and I trusted that God had put this place on our hearts for a purpose. So when we weren't able to adopt, the next time Aaron was passing through

and said hello after another church service, I said, “Can you and I meet together in my office tomorrow morning?”

The next day Aaron shared with me how the living conditions for many children in his country were indeed dire and that more girls than either of us could (or would want to) imagine were enslaved for sex. As we talked, he invited me to join him on a trek, and it was a no-brainer—*I was in*.

Saying Goodbye

I love visiting other parts of the world to share the gospel, but I hate saying goodbye. Since I travel overseas a fair amount and these trips aren’t always to destinations the US State Department recommends for travel, I try to keep a letter updated to Heather and our kids just in case something were to happen to me. Needless to say, writing that letter is never enjoyable, but it’s a precious reminder of how much you love those closest to you.

On this trip I was encouraged that two men would accompany me. First, there was Chris, a lifelong friend I’ve known since childhood. We now work together in an organization called Radical (<https://radical.net>), a global ministry and giving platform aimed at serving the church and spreading the gospel on the front lines of urgent need around the world.

Our second trekking teammate was a man I’d just met. He goes by the nickname of Sigs, and his role would be to document the trip with photography and video. I learned quickly that Sigs is an adventurous soul who has a special talent for asking questions

that really make me think. In addition to carrying his personal effects in his pack, he would also lug the camera gear, complete with extra batteries. Finding electrical outlets to recharge equipment in the Himalayan backcountry . . . well, good luck with that.

Good News?

En route, as the plane sailed through one time zone after another, I tried to sleep. I read my Bible and jotted some notes in my journal. I started missing Heather and the kids. I prayed silently for them in a deep way, asking God for an extra measure of his protection and provision for them while I'd be gone.

I also had an interesting conversation with a seatmate. His name was Charles and I learned that he was from the Congo. He also was blind. Telling me some of his story, he shared that his blindness was the result of a botched eye surgery. As we became better acquainted, I told him the purpose of my trip and had an opportunity to share the gospel with him.

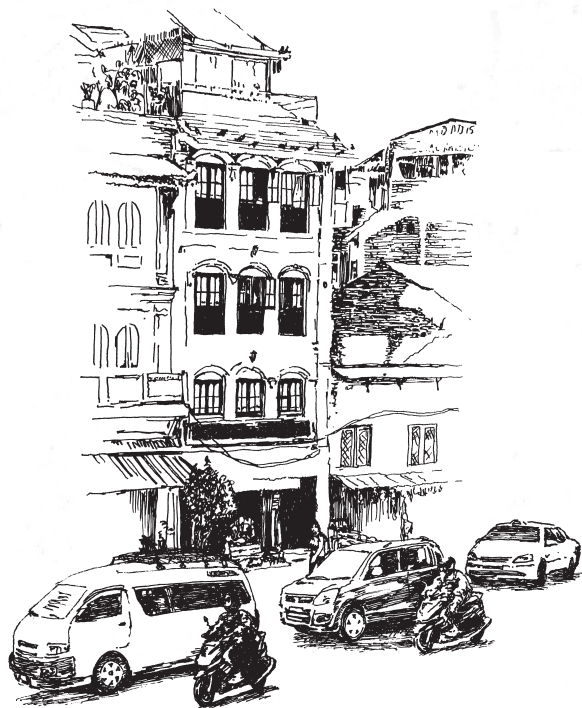
Charles was not thrilled to find out I was a follower of Jesus. He told me how his people had been hurt and harmed by some missionaries from Europe who, according to him, in the name of Christ had done disastrous things in his country. As a result, Charles's view of Jesus was significantly—and sadly—distorted.

It humbled me to hear that his experience with the “good news,” as he had heard it, was not good at all. Apparently, it's possible for various misrepresentations of the gospel to actually drive people further away from God.

I did my best to convince Charles that the true Jesus is nothing like those people who had hurt him, but he seemed unconvinced. Later I scribbled reflections in my journal about my desire to never misrepresent Jesus:

*O God, that's the last thing I want to do.
Please help me, help us, to give people an
accurate picture of you that draws them
to you, not pushes them from you.*

Day 1: Arrival



Excited but Tired

Thirty hours in coach on an airplane wears you out. It's late in the evening when we groggily step off our final plane flight out of Europe into Asia. As the plane taxis toward the terminal, Chris says with a yawn, "All I want is a place to stretch out and lie down!"

"I hear you," I answer. I look across the aisle at Sigs, who, after

he closed his tray and put his seat upright, had fallen back asleep. Yup, we're all tired.

We gather our carry-ons, and as we exit the Jetway, new sights, smells, and sounds bombard our senses. Most everyone around us is speaking a different language. Many of the women are wearing long, casual, colorful outfits with a head covering. Some of the men sport long, baggy, double-breasted shirts over matching pants. The airport restaurants give off a uniquely pungent aroma of spice and seasoning. Exhausted as we are, we still quickly realize we're not in Kansas anymore.

Somewhat disoriented, our anxiety rises because we're not sure exactly what to do or where to go. The airport signage is puzzling, written in another language and sometimes translated into English in a way that doesn't quite make sense.

When in doubt, you go with the herd, so we hoist our packs and follow our fellow passengers toward customs. With groans we see there's a long line, which we discover is scarcely moving. As we creep along we exchange glances of frustration. I suppose there's some subtle arrogance in our thoughts as our facial expressions and body language say, *I can count so many ways this system could be more efficient*. Doesn't matter. There's nothing to do but stand and shuffle.

After an hour-long wait provides us with plenty of time to stretch our legs, we hand our passports to an agent who glances at each of our photos and then at our faces before verifying the validity of our visas.

"Why are you visiting our country?" he asks.

"We want to trek through the mountains," I answer.

He nods, stamps each passport, and waves us through.

Since we are carrying everything we need in our backpacks, there's no other baggage to retrieve. As we exit the front door of the terminal building, Aaron is waiting. I greet him with a handshake and hug, then introduce him to Sigs and Chris.

"You look very tired," Aaron says with a grin. We nod in agreement. He leads us to his small van. After we climb in—sitting again actually feels good already—he starts the engine, pulls out into traffic, and says, "Let's get you to the guesthouse, where you can get some sleep."

Crazy Traffic

In this large Asian city, even though it's several hours after sundown, the streets are clogged with traffic. I mean *traffic*—every imaginable type of two-, three-, and four-wheeled vehicle, from pedal bikes to rickshaws to scooters to cars to buses to semitrucks. *Chaos!*

Aaron seems unconcerned with the near collisions that occur by the minute. He weaves the van along, often sounding his horn. Horns seem to have their own language, as drivers continually honk to communicate with others. All of us are wide awake now since this makes rush hour at home look like child's play. It's impossible to figure out the traffic laws (or if such laws even exist). The stoplights seem more like suggestions than requirements. Some intersections simply involve a multitude of vehicles arriving from every direction, converging in the middle, then slowly weaving in and out to the desired street.

In addition to the mayhem, I notice my eyes stinging slightly from the pollution, with clouds of exhaust and dust rising from semi-paved streets. Some of the residents riding the two-wheelers are wearing surgical masks to screen out some of the dirty air.

We pass by a motorcycle driven by a man who has a child in his lap, a woman (presumably his wife) sitting behind him side-saddle and holding a baby, and then two other kids squeezed in behind her. Who needs a minivan when a motorcycle will suffice?

After an hour in the hectic traffic, we arrive at the guesthouse—ah, at last the opportunity to stretch full out and sleep. We drop our packs in a room.

Before we crash for the night, Aaron gathers us for some instruction and words of encouragement: “I know these plane rides have exhausted you, and the thought of one more flight in the morning is not very appealing. But trust me. The flight tomorrow is one you will never forget!”

I Must Write This Down

I make my way to my guesthouse room, a quaint setup with a single bed and side table. A small window opens to the outside, letting a cool breeze blow gently into the room. With the soft wind comes steady noise from the street as men and women, cars and motorcycles, continue on in what seems like never-ending activity.

As I climb into bed, I pull the journal from my pack. When I was younger, a mentor of mine encouraged me to journal as part of my relationship with God. I began writing out reflections on

what God was teaching me in his Word and how I saw him working in my life and the world around me. Those reflections would inevitably turn into prayers of praise and thanks to him, petitions for my life, and intercession for others. I can't say I've journaled every day since that time, but I've done so off and on for many years and almost every day over recent years.

So even though I can barely hold my eyes open, I read these verses from Scripture (in my daily Bible reading, I was in this part of Luke) and journal along the way:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, God's word came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the vicinity of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
 Prepare the way for the Lord;
 make his paths straight!
 Every valley will be filled,
 and every mountain and hill will be made low;
 the crooked will become straight,
 the rough ways smooth,
 and everyone will see the salvation of God. (3:1–6)

I write in my journal,

Talk about hope. Valleys filled, the crooked made straight, the rough made smooth, and everyone seeing the salvation of God. These words from Isaiah spoken thousands of years before find fulfillment in the coming of Jesus. He's the hope to whom all of history has been pointing.

Reading more in Luke:

He then said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. And don’t start saying to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” (verses 7–9)

Repentance is far more important than religion. God makes clear that we can't rest in religion devoid of repentance. And true repentance is evident in the fruit of our lives.

“What then should we do?” the crowds were asking him. He replied to them, “The one who has two shirts must

share with someone who has none, and the one who has food must do the same.”

Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?”

He told them, “Don’t collect any more than what you have been authorized.”

Some soldiers also questioned him, “What should we do?”

He said to them, “Don’t take money from anyone by force or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”
(verses 10–14)

Repentance leads to a changed way of life.

Repentance requires change.

Now the people were waiting expectantly, and all of them were questioning in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah. John answered them all, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing shovel is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out.” Then, along with many other exhortations, he proclaimed good news to the people. (verses 15–18)

Clearly, the good news—the gospel—also involves bad news, a warning of coming judgment, even unquenchable fire. Lord,

help me to understand this gospel. To truly believe what it means that your wrath is real, and coming, for all who do not repent and believe in Jesus. I don't think I even know how to understand—or embrace—this truth. I find it much easier to believe that your mercy is real, and coming, for all who repent and believe in Jesus.

I fall asleep with my journal and Bible on my chest.

Reflections

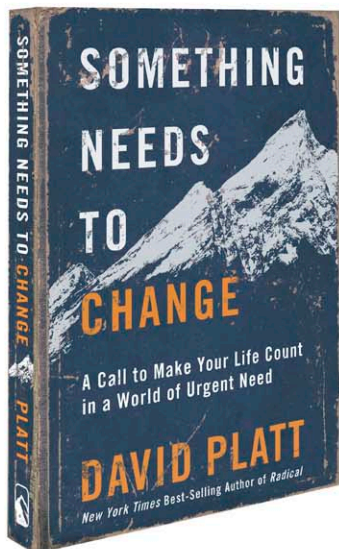
Because this book is intended to be an experience on these Himalayan trails, I will include a few questions at the end of each day of the trek to help you make the most of your own journey. So picture yourself at the end of this day lying down on a guesthouse bed (then starting tomorrow, in a cold sleeping bag), as you reflect on these questions and jot down any other thoughts or prayers that come to mind.

What would make you most nervous about going on a trek like this? What would make you most excited?

What about the gospel is hardest for you to understand?

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