

# **Beautiful** **RESISTANCE**

**THE JOY OF CONVICTION IN  
A CULTURE OF COMPROMISE**

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**JON TYSON**

**AUTHOR OF *THE BURDEN IS LIGHT***

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## BEAUTIFUL RESISTANCE

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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*For Diane Cobb,  
whose deep love and sacrificial care showed me that the  
church could be a thing of staggering beauty.*

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His intent was that now, through the church,  
the manifold wisdom of God should be made  
known to the rulers and authorities in the  
heavenly realms.

**EPHESIANS 3:10**

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# Introduction

It's early in the morning and I am drinking bad coffee, trying to keep my eyes open after a late-night drive. I am in Poland, where I do not speak the language, cannot understand the street signs, and do not know exactly where I am going. I am trying to find a scene from the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer that has haunted me since I read about it five years ago.

I drive along the Eastern Oder River. The air is warm; the day is quiet—not much in sight. There are no historical markers, no signs of what I am looking for.

Finally I see it—a small hill above the banks of the river. I park and walk up. From a clearing, as I knew I would, I have views down the river toward a place called Finkenwalde and up the hill to the site of a former German airfield. Here on this hill, eighty years earlier, a conversation took place that still resonates for me and for all who are concerned with whether Christ or culture will have the ascendancy in our generation.

## A PLACE CALLED FINKENWALDE

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of Jesus's exemplary disciples of the last century. His faithfulness to Christ in the midst of a failing church has borne witness long after his short life. Bonhoeffer was not raised in a fundamentally religious home, yet exposure to the Roman Catholic Church during his travels, and

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relationships with some key Protestant theologians of his day, drew his heart into the beauty and power of the church. After completing his doctorate at the age of twenty-one, he grew to become a significant figure in the resistance against Hitler and the broken German church.

In 1933, the threat of Nazi power was growing in Germany and many were concerned about the compromise of the church with the Nazi movement. The church was capitulating to and cooperating with the Reich, handing the loyalties that belong to Christ to the Führer. Bonhoeffer expert Gaylon Barker pointed out, “Hitler did not merely want to rule Germany politically; rather, he wanted to control the hearts and souls of its citizens. At a very fundamental level, therefore, this was as much a religious battle as it was a political struggle.”<sup>1</sup> It would eventually lead to one of the darkest moments in the history of the church and the extermination of more than six million Jews.

As many sat by, the takeover of the church accelerated. When a Nazi-supported group gained control of the German Evangelical Church, they wanted to exclude all non-Aryan clergy, revise the liturgy to make it more German, and even remove the Old Testament from the Bible. At a 1934 synod that led to the establishment of the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer signed the Barmen Declaration, which was to become a manifesto of fidelity to Christ. Penned largely by Karl Barth, it declared the church was to be loyal to Christ and not to be an organ of the state.

Seeing the weakness of many German pastors and their lack of preparation for obedience to Christ and resistance to the regime, the Confessing Church sensed the need for stronger training. In 1935 Bonhoeffer accepted the invitation to create an underground seminary that would match orthodox belief with orthodox praxis. His vision was an intentional Christian community committed to living the ethic of Jesus found in the Sermon on the Mount.

In the providence of God, a large, empty house—originally a manor house of the von Katte family—was available near Stettin, in the rural town of Finkenwalde. There a schedule of study and common life began. Seminary life centered on prayer, the Scriptures, confession, and shared rhythms, and much

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of the vision was included in Bonhoeffer's well-known works *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship*.

For the students, in the middle of the onslaught of hell, this was a portal to heaven. Bonhoeffer wrote during this period, "The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer."<sup>2</sup> Their daily rhythm of life together was built on a vision for a new kind of disciple, one characterized by fidelity to Jesus Christ despite the cost, one who believed in Christ's millennial reign, not that of the Reich. This robust vision of discipleship would be tested as the Gestapo would arrest more than two dozen Finkenwalde students after the seminary was shut down.

## THIS MUST BE STRONGER THAN THAT

When Bonhoeffer's friends began to read copies of his sermons and hear reports about the intensity of the discipleship at Finkenwalde, questions began to arise. Was this level of formation truly necessary? Would the Finkenwalders burn out? Would they lose credibility and be seen as too extreme by the national leadership?

One friend in particular, a young historian named Wilhelm Niesel, who had heard Bonhoeffer lecture in 1933, came up from Berlin to visit, being "suspicious of too much 'spiritualism.'"<sup>3</sup> Bonhoeffer took Niesel on a rowing trip to the Oder Sound. One author described the scene this way:

When the two rowers reached the far shore, Bonhoeffer led Niesel up a small hill to a clearing from which they could see in the distance a vast field and the "runways of a nearby squadron." German fighter planes were taking off and landing, and soldiers moved hurriedly in purposeful patterns, like so many ants. Bonhoeffer spoke of a new generation of Germans in training, whose disciplines were formed "for a kingdom . . . of hardness and cruelty." It would be necessary, he explained, to propose a superior discipline if the Nazis were to be defeated.

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“You have to be stronger than these tormentors that you find everywhere today.”<sup>4</sup>

This image is the one that haunted me and drew me to the banks of the Oder after a sleepless night of driving. Bonhoeffer, a pastor with unflinching loyalty to the Cross, standing as a prophetic sign to the world. On the side of a river, overlooking the massing Nazi troops, he stood in the shadow of eternity. A man of convictions, a man of contrasts.

What he was doing in Finkenwalde had to be stronger than what Hitler was doing with his army.

Discipleship must be stronger than cultural formation.

Loyalty must be stronger than compromise.

This must be stronger than that.

The times called for a beautiful resistance.

Such a prophetic stance was in some ways laughable. Bonhoeffer’s seminary was small and its season short. The Gestapo would close the seminary in 1937. In many ways it was a feeble joke compared with the power of the Third Reich.

But it was a prophetic seed of a faithful church. And over time, as Jesus promised, that small seed grew and bore fruit. Today the Reich is a shameful memory, Hitler is in the grave, and the German church is repentant. But the fruit of Finkenwalde—the community, the vision, and the work—has gone on to shape a vision of Christian discipleship that has inspired millions.

Bonhoeffer was right. This *must* be stronger than that. This *was* stronger than that.

All this was running through my mind as I stood overlooking the Oder Sound—perhaps at the very spot where Bonhoeffer once took his friend—thinking about *our* cultural moment and the compromise rampant in our day. *Should we just give up and capitulate to the powers of our time? Should we sit by while our faith is taken captive by political and ideological forces? Should we avert our eyes while mammon wreaks havoc on our hearts? Should we watch*

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*twenty million young people leave the church in our generation? A million a year give up on faith?<sup>5</sup> Is it possible to build community in such a way that though it is small, generations to come will look back on our faithfulness in a generation of compromise?*

## THE NEW RESISTANCE

I believe that what was true in the 1930s is true now. We live in a time when the church is compromising with the culture left, right, and center, and we're losing our influence. Though there is no specific "Hitler" pressuring us, we face a myriad of forces seeking to sabotage our faith. Because of the tectonic shift in sexuality, ethics, technology, secular ideologies, religion, and globalization, much of the familiar landscape has been swept away. In many areas our culture is almost unrecognizable compared with a generation ago. The spiritual devastation from much of this cultural change and the failure of the church to respond well have been almost unthinkable.

So we must call our generation to loyalty to Christ. We must live with devotion and conviction regardless of what they cost us. This must be stronger than that.

I am sure that you, too, have felt this conflict between the potential of the church and its compromise in our day, and I am sure that you have felt the conflict in your soul between who you are and whom God calls you to be. I'm speaking to you as a fellow disciple with urgency in my heart: this is the time for *our* beautiful resistance.

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# Chapter 1

## A Church Coming Back to Life

[The church] exists . . . to set up in the world a new sign which is radically dissimilar to [the world's] own manner and which contradicts it in a way which is full of promise.

KARL BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*

I will build my church.

Matthew 16:18

In a *New York Times* article entitled “Googling for God,” Seth Stephens-Davidowitz wrote, “It has been a bad decade for God, at least so far.”

Searches questioning God’s existence are up. . . . Porn searches are up 83 percent. For heroin, it’s 32 percent.

How are the Ten Commandments doing? Not well. “Love thy neighbor” is the most common search with the word “neighbor” in it, but right behind at No. 2 is “neighbor porn.” The top Google search including the word “God” is “God of War,” a video game.<sup>1</sup>

It’s been a tough decade for God, and his church has not fared well either.

The church that Jesus founded on his compassion and grace has at times failed to even resemble its founder. Celebrity pastor scandals; abuses in the

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Catholic Church; political hijacking; indifference to the humanitarian crises of our day, including refugees, racism, and environmentalism; materialism; and complacency have caused many to leave the church.

I carry some cultural shame in this moment as a pastor. When I meet people and they ask what I do, I fumble for how to respond. I used to say witty and impressive things like “I am a consultant that specializes in helping the largest nonprofit on earth be more effective at caring for the poor and alleviating human suffering.” Now I just tell them I am a pastor, and they often reply with a strained “Oh” and shuffle off to a less awkward conversation. I’ve sat over coffee with countless people—some of whom until recently were parishioners of mine—who say they cannot continue to be associated with Christianity after some of the things they have seen Christians say and do. I’ve *seen* and *felt* the change in the church’s reputation. And I’ve been embarrassed by my fellow Christians’ behavior more than once.

Yet no matter our disgust at the church’s failure, Christ himself must feel the most grief. How can a community founded on enemy love be guilty of such distortions? Nietzsche once said, “Better songs they would have to sing to make me believe in their Redeemer: more redeemed would his disciples have to appear!”<sup>2</sup>

At this point in history, with so much abuse, I’m not sure that that would even do the job. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot” (Matthew 5:13). In our world at large, opinion seems to have crystalized. We are being thrown out. We are being trampled underfoot.

In Malachi 2:3, God stated this with even more strength: “Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it.” Our failures have left us with dung on our faces, wiped there by God so we get a sense of the stench we have become in the world.

Is there any hope for a church dealing with so much brokenness?

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There is hope. Each generation of believers is given an opportunity to tell the story of Jesus through the local church. Regardless of her history, we get to put the brilliance of Jesus on display.

I have written this book to try to stir your faith that God can again use his people to bear witness to his rule and reign. I want to kindle your faith into flame so you will believe that your life can become what Jesus calls it to be. I believe that the time for a rejection of apathy and hopelessness is at hand. The Spirit still hovers over the darkness and chaos in your life, waiting to create something beautiful and compelling. All great revivals have taken place in times of decline. Resurrection is found among the dead. I want to call you to resist compromise when your friends tell you your faith is too intense, your devotion unnecessary, your life together too much. In the following pages, we will contrast things that make for brokenness and things that make for beauty.

I will challenge you to look into your heart and evaluate how you perhaps have been complicit in underplaying the gospel. I'll give you advice, tested in my own life and congregation, for starting to make the journey back to conviction in key areas where we have made compromises. The joy and satisfaction that come from being faithful to Christ will always be richer than the mere ease that comes from drifting along the cultural currents.

I will seek to show you the joys and challenges that come when resistance rises in your heart and formation begins to happen. Together we will examine the depth of the brokenness and seek the antidote. We will examine the contrast in forces and fight for a way forward.

May we take up Bonhoeffer's posture of defiance on the river that day in 1937. May our vision of life together—and faithfulness in following Jesus—be a seed of hope in your life and in the life of our longing world.

## THE CONTINUING PROMISE OF THE CHURCH

For the better part of two decades, I have had a complex relationship with the institution called the church. Jesus called her a bride, one of my atheist friends

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called her a wench, and I have experienced her as both. This duality has caused me to wrestle at a primal level with my faith and my relationship with the church. I am often haunted by the way she doesn't look much like Jesus and why at times I don't either. I have grappled with issues like the exclusive claims of Jesus, historic Christian sexual ethics, the church's complicity in slavery and the oppression of women, violence in the Old Testament, and the church's promiscuity with the systems of the world. I am also grieved by my failures and personal contribution to the staining of her reputation. My own apathy and judgment, my hypocrisy and pride, my failures as a pastor and leader.

But for better or worse, I have been obsessed with the potential of the covenant people of God. I stubbornly believe that the church can be a source of hope and reconciliation in the midst of the world. My love for the church is not a naive love. I have seen the church be a place of breathtaking beauty, and I have seen the church in demonic squalor. The scars on my soul come from the church, as does the joy that has come to define me. Leading in the church has been the source of both the trauma and the consolations in my life.

My perspective on the church is a Western one. I come from a part of the world where I am daily told of the decreasing relevance and accelerating decline of the institution I have given my life to. It's not just the culture walking away from the church; some of my pastor friends have too. They seem to have grown weary of the maintenance of an institution on life support. Why kill themselves to keep this thing going, and for whom? Jesus may still build his church, but they won't be helping.

That's when I remind myself of how history shows that Jesus's commitment to his church is unshakable. Though we have profaned his name among the nations, he retains a passion for his people. We may be hypocrites, we may return to our vomit like dogs, we may embarrass him and distort his message, but the Cross is a covenant Jesus takes seriously. "For better or worse" seems to mean something to the Son of God. Love isn't an idea for God; it's who he is.

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The Scriptures give several metaphors for the church that show us Jesus's vision for and commitment to the church. Even in this day, they hold true.

## THE CHURCH IS STILL THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

People give their lives away when they fall in love. They surrender their schedules, their finances, even their bodies for the chance to be with the other. Hardened cynics become helpless romantics when they fall in love. Yet many fail to see Jesus's commitment to the church in this light.

Though flawed and broken, the church is the one that Jesus loves. Paul wrote this to the Ephesians: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (5:25–27).

Jesus does not view the church simply through a doctrinal, moral, ethical, or sociological lens; he views it through a covenantal lens. Speaker and author Frank Viola noted,

In Genesis 1 and 2, the Bible opens up with a woman and a man. In Revelation 21 and 22, the Bible closes with a woman and a man. The Bible opens up with a wedding, and it ends with a wedding. It opens with a marriage and it ends with a marriage. . . .

*Your Bible is essentially a love story.*<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is not committed to the church because he has to be; he is committed to the church because he wants to be. God is in love with a woman, and her name is the church.

We see this wedding metaphor from the beginning of redemption. When God used Moses to call the children of Israel into their destiny, he made four promises (Exodus 6:6–7):

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- I will take you out.
- I will rescue you.
- I will redeem you.
- I will take you to me.

These four promises were the same four invitations a young man made to a woman on her wedding day. God was not just delivering Israel; he was proposing to her. He called her his “treasured possession” (Exodus 19:5), the same words a groom would use for his bride.<sup>4</sup>

Ezekiel 16 highlights this in even greater detail: “I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put sandals of fine leather on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. . . . You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD” (verses 9–14). God has couture taste. His bride will be beautifully adorned.

The challenge of loving a bride like the church is her promiscuous heart. At times she is seduced by the power and grandeur of the world. She often gives her heart to unthinkable ideologies and idolatry, committing adultery with the enemies of Christ. But for whatever reason, God seeks her out, restores her, and brings her back.

This vision of God’s passion for the church provides incredible hope. As much as we all have things we hate about the failures of the church, we have been guilty of doing the very things we criticize in her. We have judged and excluded others, we have failed sexually, we have been hypocrites, and we have loved money and power and the praise of people. Yet Jesus still extends his heart and grace to us. Christ seeks us out, welcomes us home, washes away our sin, and showers us with his love.

The church can be beautiful because grace is beautiful. The church can

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renew her calling because God loves her with undying love. Beauty can resist brokenness because of the passion of the groom. The question is, Will we respond to Jesus's passion for us and be faithful in our generation? Viola continued, "What is the Lord looking for?"

He is looking for a people who will take their stand in Christ. He's after a people who will dare to believe that they are part of Christ's beloved bride. A people who will defy what they see through their natural eyes and instead look through His eyes. He is looking for a people who see themselves as He sees them, through the prism of divine righteousness, part of a new creation wherein the fall has been eliminated. This is the necessary beginning to fulfilling God's grand mission. To take any other view is to serve God out of guilt, religious duty, or ambition rather than out of love.<sup>5</sup>

## THE CHURCH IS STILL THE TEMPLE OF GOD

One of my friends told me that the last place they would ever go to try to find God would be the church. This is nothing short of a tragedy.

The central thing the church is designed to be is a place for his presence. Many of the things we think about when we think about God—law, sacrifice, priests, and theological confessions—were never intended to play the central role they have come to play in our faith today. From the very beginning, God's purpose and passion was to be present with his people. Genesis opens with God in a garden, walking with humanity in the cool of the day (3:8). Most of the things people think of when they think of the church were responses to the fracture of our communion with God and expulsion from his presence. Law, sacrifice, and a priesthood were all ways God's presence had to be mediated because of our sin and brokenness but were not part of God's original design. And all of human history is headed toward restored, intimate, face-to-face relationship with him. In fact, the entire redeemed creation will be a temple of

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intimate communion. Revelation 21:22–23 says, “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.”

God’s presence among his people has always been his heart. God’s vision was not a building to belong in but a people to walk among.<sup>6</sup> Moses, the friend of God, seemed to understand this key point. In a conversation with God while heading to the promised land, he declared that if God’s presence did not go with them, they would refuse to leave (Exodus 33:15). Moses asked, “What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” (verse 16). What else would distinguish them from the nations around them? How about circumcision for a start? How about food restrictions? How about the Sabbath and yearly festivals? How about a list of ethical commandments that would play a defining role in human society for the next 3,500 years? Yet despite these other distinguishing marks, Moses knew that the presence of God was the thing that truly set apart the people of God from the nations around them. The other distinctions were simply social, cultural, and religious boundaries any community could display. But God’s presence? That was unmistakable.

At the time of Jesus’s ministry, rebuilding of the temple had been under way for forty-six years (John 2:20), and the temple was breathtaking to behold. Its beauty was so well known that the rabbis said, “No one has seen a truly beautiful building unless he has seen the temple.”<sup>7</sup> Yet part of the scandal of Jesus’s ministry among the Jews was his critique of what the temple had become. After the departure of the glory of God in Ezekiel 10, the temple had been only a symbol, void of substance. It was a religious program without the glorious presence. Jesus called it “a den of robbers” and cleansed it with a whip, turning over the money changers’ tables (Matthew 21:12–13; John 2:15). He said it would be torn down and then rebuilt after three days (Matthew 24:1–2; John 2:19–20). His ability to forgive sins on earth rendered the priestly system obsolete. His presence on earth was a threat to a system but salvation for sin-

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ners. God's presence had arrived in Christ himself. In fact, this is the great claim of John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [literally, spread his tent] among us." The presence that departed in Ezekiel was back, but it was in a person, not a place. During the Crucifixion, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). God had left the building. It is interesting to note that the temple continued its ministry for about forty more years until the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. This means that the priests sewed another curtain and put it up to try to keep God in the temple. But it was too late—the Resurrection released the Spirit, and the temple moved from a place to a people.

Through the blood of Jesus Christ and our union with him, *we* have become the temple. Paul said as much to the Corinthian church: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple" (1 Corinthians 3:16–17). This is the most incredible claim in human history. The Incarnation meant God with us, but the coming of the Spirit means God in us. Through the death of Jesus on the cross, we have become the place where God dwells. The church is the temple of God, embodying the presence of God on earth.

Can others see that in us?

## GOD IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

Our world is often drawn to the visible and prestigious, especially when it comes to the church. Our emphasis on properties and buildings can create a false sense that the building is the temple and that Jesus manifests himself primarily at religiously sanctioned events. But if we are the temple, his presence can be found among us, perhaps especially in the least likely places.

Philip Yancey told a story of one of these encounters while touring a leprosy rehabilitation center in Nepal. Upon entering the Green Pastures Hospital, he noticed one of the ugliest people he had ever seen. Deformed stumps

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instead of feet, bandaged hands, and a face ravaged by the punishing disease of leprosy. When Yancey looked at the woman's face, instead of a nose, he could see all the way into the sinus cavity. She was completely blind, covered in scars and gauze wrap.

After they were given a tour of the facility, he saw this woman again and realized she had dragged herself along the ground with her elbows like an injured animal. He shared,

I'm ashamed to say my first thought was, *She's a beggar and she wants money*. My wife, who has worked among the down-and-out, had a much more holy reaction. Without hesitation she bent down to the woman and put her arm around her. The old woman rested her head against Janet's shoulder and began singing a song in Nepali, a tune that we all instantly recognized: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

"Dahnmaya is one of our most devoted church members," the physical therapist later told us. "Most of our patients are Hindus, but we have a little Christian chapel here, and Dahnmaya comes every time the door opens. She's a prayer warrior. She loves to greet and welcome every visitor who comes to Green Pastures, and no doubt she heard us talking as we walked along the corridor."<sup>8</sup>

In an instant he realized his prejudice had blocked his access to the presence of God in her. This experience reframed his understanding of the church as God's temple in the world. He continued,

A few months later we heard that Dahnmaya had died. Close to my desk I keep a photo that I snapped just as she was singing to Janet. . . . I see two beautiful women: my wife, smiling sweetly, wearing a brightly colored Nepali outfit she had bought the day before, holding in her

arms an old crone who would flunk any beauty test ever devised except the one that matters most. Out of that deformed, hollow shell of a body, the light of God's presence shines out. The Holy Spirit found a home.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus is committed to his church because he is committed to dwelling among us. And his presence is no longer found on Sinai or Zion but in ordinary people like us.

## THE CHURCH IS STILL THE BODY OF CHRIST

I often hear believers say it would be easier to follow Jesus today if he were physically present on earth. I sympathize with this longing. Who hasn't wished Christ would come and settle thousands of years of theological debates and define discipleship for our times? Jesus, however, doesn't seem to have shared this sentiment. In John 16:7, he said that his ascension was for our advantage so that the Helper could come. Jesus wants his followers to grow and have agency, and he prefers partnership to dictatorship in his relationship with us. As C. S. Lewis noted, God "seems to do nothing of Himself which He can possibly delegate to His creatures. He commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what He could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye."<sup>10</sup> God wanted not a domain to dominate but a people to partner with. In his vision of tangible presence, Christ has chosen to manifest himself through us.

This was a profound revelation for Paul. When confronting him on the road to Damascus, Jesus asked, "Why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). Yet in Paul's mind he wasn't persecuting Christ, just fanatical followers of a failed rabbi. Yet Jesus implied that to persecute his followers was to persecute him. The head in heaven felt the pains of his body on earth. This revelation transformed Paul's understanding of what the church actually was. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, he wrote, "You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of

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it.” God is looking for a people who want to be filled with his presence and live for his purposes in the world. He wants a surrendered body willing to express his heart and carry out his mission on the earth.

Frank Viola put it this way:

Evil spirits desire to inhabit human bodies because they crave expression. That’s the whole point of possession. They seek to take over a human body so that they can express themselves through it, employing it for wicked purposes on the earth.

Jesus Christ is now in the Spirit. And He craves expression also. He seeks to make His life visible through a many-membered being. . . . The body of Christ exists to express God in the earth.<sup>11</sup>

## OVERCOMING LOCKED-IN SYNDROME

Jean-Dominique Bauby was the French editor of *Elle* magazine and a respected journalist. The father of two, he was known for his sophistication and passion.

One December day his life was disrupted in a jarring way. Only forty-three years old, he suffered a massive stroke that devastated his body. He was in a coma for twenty days, and when he awoke, he found he had lost control of his entire frame. His mouth, arms, and legs would not move. He could not speak or communicate except for one saving grace: he could blink one of his eyes. His mental faculties were completely intact, but he had no way to communicate. Bauby was caught in locked-in syndrome.

In *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, the film that tells the story of his life, you see the frustration and determination in Bauby’s spirit. One horrific scene shows a doctor sewing one of his eyes shut, while in a voice-over Bauby gives complete and coherent commentary on everything happening to him. When the doctors eventually became aware of what had happened to him, they struggled to find a way to reach the man whose body had become his prison. Bauby

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ached to communicate, but his whole will, vision, passion, and heart were reduced to the blinking of an eye.

He eventually learned to communicate, but the process was remarkably drawn out. An assistant would recite the alphabet, and when she came to the right letter, Bauby would blink. Then she would recite the alphabet again, and when she reached the right letter, Bauby would blink again. This would happen dozens of times until he spelled out a sentence. Then it would happen hundreds more times until a paragraph was formed. By this excruciatingly slow process, Bauby was able to write his own memoir. *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* was released to wide acclaim. He tragically died of pneumonia just two days after the book was published.

After watching the film, it's a solemn experience to read the book. You have a sober understanding of the glacial pace of composition, Bauby's frustration with his frail and failing body, and the patience of his assistant faithfully transcribing his work. But the prose is beautiful and moving. Consider his description of his condition: "I am fading away. Slowly but surely. Like the sailor who watches the home shore gradually disappear, I watch my past recede. My old life still burns within me, but more and more of it is reduced to the ashes of memory."<sup>12</sup>

As I finished the film and walked around my neighborhood, I remained in a state of gratitude and wonder at the ease with which my limbs moved. I sat on a bench and consciously moved each muscle slowly, thanking God for my toes, my ankle, my shin, my knee . . . You get the point. As I was sitting there in the warmth of the sun, I was struck by the resemblance between Bauby's situation and God's relationship to his body, the church. In some sense, we suffer from a form of locked-in syndrome. Christ, our head, full of vision, longing, and passion for the world, aches to be able to express himself through a functioning body. But something seems to have happened, some kind of spiritual stroke. Only a portion of our potential is being realized while Jesus blinks out his vision through a fraction of his church.

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As I walked home, a prayer rose in my heart, one that has kept me blinking ever since. *Lord, bring your body to life. May it express your heart and passion in a way that reveals the splendor of your salvation to the world.*

Jesus will express himself through us, and slowly but surely, parts of Jesus's body, the church, are coming back to life. In China the church has grown to around 100 million while facing Communist opposition. In Central America the Pentecostal church is living in staggering revival, and in Africa the church has grown at a breathtaking rate in the last hundred years. And hunger is rising in the West. More and more, people I meet are seeking God for revival and are contending like never before. Our resurrecting God is bringing his body to life.

## SIGNS OF LIFE

There is a rumor going around the West that, in spite of the avalanche of change and the often-repeated accusation of irrelevance, a church has actually survived. Yes, she is stained; yes, she is broken; but she is here. Her Lord is at work within her. The bride is becoming beautiful; his presence is becoming tangible; the body is becoming functional. Beauty is rising and resisting the brokenness.

He will get the glory. But you and I can be part of the process. I'm not saying it will be easy. Or even safe. If you know how Bonhoeffer came to his end, you know how steep was the cost of his discipleship. But he truly lived while the Lord gave him days on the earth, and his life is still bearing fruit today. Don't you want the same to be said of you?

Doing your part to convert the church from compromise to conviction—to restore her saltiness and turn up her light—is a cause worth giving your life to.

In the chapters ahead, we'll be looking at crucial areas where we must resist compromise in all the beauty of Christlike love and grace. I will address the issues that I feel are most foundational yet also overlooked, ones that will make the biggest difference in your life. I will also try to address them at a deep level. We all know we should love God and love our neighbors (Matthew 22:37–40),

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but what does that really mean? What does loving God look like with nuance and texture *now*? I believe it looks like worship, rest, and an insatiable spiritual hunger. Likewise, what does it mean to love your neighbor well? I would say it means practicing hospitality, giving honor, loving our enemies, making sacrifices, and celebrating God's goodness together.

A church pursuing that could *actually* start a beautiful resistance.

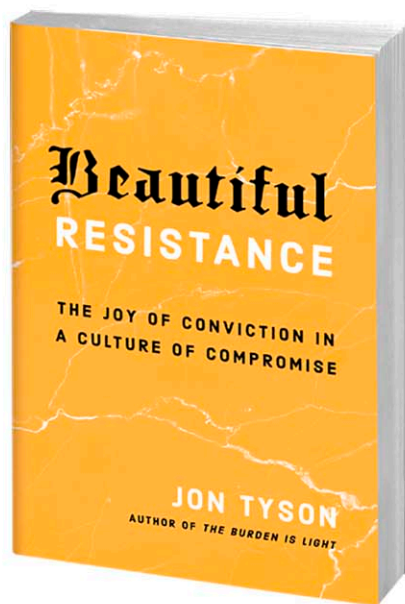
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