

**AARON GRAHAM**

**UNSHAKABLE**

**FAITH**



**HOW  
TO  
STAND FIRM  
IN A  
CULTURE OF LIES**

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*To the people of The District Church,  
who have dared to believe that revival is possible—  
even in our nation's capital.*

*This book reflects your faith and courage.  
May you continue to stand firm in the gospel.*

My dear brothers and sisters, *stand firm*. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

—1 Corinthians 15:58

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## WHEN TRUTH GETS TWISTED

### *How Secular Culture Is Rewriting Christianity from Within*

My dear Wormwood, I note with grave displeasure that your patient has become a Christian . . . There is no need to despair; hundreds of these adult converts have been reclaimed after a brief sojourn in the Enemy's camp and are now with us.

—*The Screwtape Letters*, Letter 2

A few years ago, I was trying to enjoy a long-awaited vacation, but I couldn't. Names kept flooding my mind: Friends from high school. College classmates. Ministry peers. People who once followed Jesus passionately but had since drifted away.

Eventually, I gave up trying to block it out. I grabbed a notebook and started writing down names, one after another and page after page. As the list grew, so did the ache inside me. Eventually I put down my pen and wept.

So. Many. Names. And this list was just my peers, people I had grown up with and served alongside. It didn't include those I've pastored over the last twenty years. That list would be much longer.

For decades I've watched too many of God's people walk away. Again and again, I find myself weeping and praying that they would turn back to the God who is waiting to receive them with open arms.

I've written this book because I am on a mission to help you develop an unshakable faith. To help you discern the lies we are being fed by our culture.

But before I go any further, I need to make a confession: I've been part of the problem.

## THE DISCIPLESHIP CRISIS

I used to think my job as a pastor was simple. Get people in the door. Win them to Christ. Connect them to a small group. Lovingly serve our city. I thought if my church did these things with excellence, we would influence our city for Christ.

But here's what I learned: It doesn't matter how many people you get through the front door if you aren't concerned about how many are walking out the back.

Many Christians are compromising their faith or leaving it altogether—not because they've rejected Jesus outright, but because they're being shaped more by *secular culture* than by the historic Christian faith. In other words, they are becoming secularized “Christians”—still professing Christ, but being shaped more by culture than Scripture.

And while there are many places to point the blame, pastors like me have been chief among them. We have often failed to take seriously the slow, subtle way the world steps in where the church steps back.

What I've come to realize is this: *If the church doesn't disciple people, the world gladly will.*

And right now, the world is doing a better job.

Every year, millions walk away from their faith in Jesus.<sup>1</sup> And although it's more difficult to track, the number of people who still call themselves Christians while compromising the core teachings of Christianity is even greater.

I don't know about you, but as a family member, friend, pastor, and most important, follower of Jesus, I am burdened.

War is being waged. It's not a physical war fought with weapons. It's not a culture war fought with clickbait or sound bites. It's a spiritual war—fought over what is true and false regarding the one true and living God.

And the battlefield? It's the hearts and minds of people in my church and city, and in yours.

Although I know how the war ends (Revelation 12:10–11), I am burdened because, many days, it feels like we are losing.

Casualties are stacking up. And I don't want you—or the people you love—to become one of them.

### WHERE I WENT WRONG

For much of my ministry, I thought the main challenge was making the gospel relevant.

I believed that if we emphasized our justice and mercy work—if we showed we cared about the poor, the city, the hurting—then people would see Christianity as credible. I especially thought this plan would work in a place like D.C., where people are highly educated and deeply engaged in issues of justice. I thought, if we could just prove we care about what people care about, they'd be more open to Jesus.

But here's where I went wrong: Relevance isn't the same as faithfulness.

In my efforts to make the gospel feel accessible and inoffensive, I unintentionally softened its edges. Under my influence, my church highlighted the parts of faith that aligned with cultural values and downplayed the parts that required deep repentance or countercultural obedience. We gave people a vision for how Christianity could fit into their lives, rather than calling them to reorient their entire lives around Christ.

And this doesn't just happen from the pulpit. Many of us, especially young Christians, feel the pressure to present a version of our faith that will be accepted by our peers. We curate our beliefs on social media to seem thoughtful, not offensive. We avoid hard conversations. We want to be known as loving

and inclusive, not judgmental or narrow-minded. And in the process, we often end up living a faith that's more about image than about truth.

Let me be clear: I'm not saying we need fewer justice ministries or more boring church services. I'm not calling for harsh, judgmental Christianity that repels more than it invites. What I am saying is this: In our effort to make faith more culturally relevant, we've too often compromised the very truths that make it transformative.

Faithfulness to Jesus requires compassion and conviction. But when we elevate cultural acceptance above biblical allegiance, we end up reshaping the gospel to fit the moment—rather than proclaiming the truth that transcends every moment.

And over time, that compromise creates a vacuum. We begin to neglect deep discipleship. We stop asking hard questions. And as a result, many look elsewhere for answers—not from mature spiritual mentors, but from Instagram therapists, TikTok influencers, or cynical deconstruction threads on Reddit.

Lies then flood into this discipleship void—and sadly, many come from *within the church*. The most dangerous lies are often the ones that sound the most compassionate, the most modern, the most “Christian.” Sometimes they're even preached from the pulpit.

The consequences of this softening aren't theoretical; they're deeply personal. I've seen it play out in the lives of people I care about. Despite our best intentions, the faith we modeled and taught wasn't always deep enough to anchor them when the cultural currents shifted. It wasn't that they stopped believing overnight. It was slower, subtler. A quiet drift that started with good intentions but ended in a faith unrecognizable from the one they once proclaimed.

I remember a young leader I mentored years ago—passionate, smart, and very committed to serving. He served eagerly and soaked up everything we taught. But over time, I started noticing subtle changes. His social media posts gradually shifted—less Scripture, more activism. He stopped attending church regularly, saying he could connect with God just as easily through nature or a podcast. When I reached out, he told me he still loved Jesus, but no longer felt aligned with “organized religion.”

A few years later, he told me he was reevaluating *everything*. He hadn’t rejected Jesus, at least not in name. But the Jesus he now followed looked less like the one in the Gospels and more like a vague spiritual guide who affirmed all his choices. He didn’t walk away in one dramatic moment—it happened gradually, almost imperceptibly. As his pastor and friend, I couldn’t help but wonder: Had we disciplined him well? Had we articulated a deep enough faith that was resilient to stand up to cultural pressure?

### THE LIES THAT FILL THE VOID

When we started as a church, my mentor and leadership guru, Pastor Steve Stroope, sent me a sample job description for my role as a pastor. The first responsibility listed in the long description was this: “The Lead Pastor is to protect the congregation from false teaching” (Acts 20:28).

At the time, I thought I could skip over that part. Other parts of the job description felt more urgent—facilities, finances, outreach, evangelism. *Besides*, I thought, *I pastor a church in the most educated city in the world. Our people are smart. They’re responsible and articulate. Many of them grew up in church. If they didn’t, they’re fast learners. Surely, they can discern false*

*teaching on their own.* But as I reflect on the number of people who have drifted from their relationship with God, I'm reminded why this calling—to resist false teaching—is so important.

Jesus warned us in Matthew 7:15–16, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.”

Jesus’ warning troubles me for several reasons.

First, these false prophets are not outside the church—they’re *in it*. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned about persecution from outside: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness” (Matthew 5:10). But here, the danger is from within.

Second, Jesus called them *prophets*. These aren’t just church attendees—they’re church *leaders*. False teaching isn’t just present—it’s platformed. It’s in our small groups, our discipleship classes, our pulpits.

Third, Jesus said they’re *ferocious wolves*. They might appear to have good intentions, but their teaching will wound you. Jesus later said, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves” (Matthew 10:16). Paul echoed these words in his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders: “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock” (Acts 20:29).

There are wolves in the church, and they are hunting sheep.

Finally—and perhaps most disturbing—Jesus said they come in *sheep’s clothing*. They disguise themselves. They look like everyone else.<sup>2</sup> They speak truth—*mostly*. It’s been said the biggest lies contain a surprising amount of truth. A message can be 90 percent correct and still be built around one soul-destroying lie. That’s what makes false teaching so hard to dis-

cern: You find yourself amending so many things they say.

This has always been the enemy's strategy. He mixes truth with lies.

It's how he tempted Jesus in the wilderness—with Scripture, twisted Scripture. Paul warned the Corinthian church: "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:14–15).

We must be careful and discerning. Just because someone has a mic, a book deal, a stage, or a verified account does not mean their words are trustworthy. False prophets are the original deepfake.

So how do we spot false teaching? How do we keep from being led astray?

Much of this book is devoted to those very questions—helping you peel back the religious veneer and confront what's really being taught. Even more important, helping you return to the beautiful, unshakable truth of the real Jesus, who makes the Christian faith so compelling, beautiful, and transformative.

### EXPRESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM

The enemy's lies don't appear in a vacuum. They are delivered through culture—and one of the primary delivery systems today is what sociologists call "expressive individualism."

Sociologist Robert Bellah, who wrote *Habits of the Heart*, coined this phrase.<sup>3</sup> It's the belief that authority lies within your own experience and interpretation of the truth. You get to decide for yourself what is best and morally good. Each person has their own path to truth. The chief goal in life becomes your own happiness, your own version of truth, your own ex-

perience. Authority rests in your feelings, rather than a universal truth that applies to everyone.

These messages are packaged in slogans we've heard a thousand times—harmless on the surface, but deeply formative beneath:

- “*You be you.*” As Beyoncé said, “Your self-worth is determined by you. You don’t have to depend on someone telling you who you are.”<sup>4</sup>
- “*Follow your heart.*” Joel Osteen writes, “You have to learn to follow your heart. You can’t let other people pressure you into being something that you’re not.”<sup>5</sup>
- “*Live your truth.*” As Glennon Doyle—who publicly walked away from her Christian faith—writes in *Untamed*: “Maybe Eve was never meant to be our warning. Maybe she was meant to be our model. Own your wanting. Eat the apple. Let it burn.”<sup>6</sup>

In *Disappearing Church*, Mark Sayers describes the beliefs that thrive in this environment.<sup>7</sup> At its core expressive individualism is the conviction that individual freedom is the highest good. Anything that restricts that freedom—tradition, religion, even biology—is seen as oppressive and must be dismantled. People are assumed to be inherently good, so if everyone just follows their inner voice, society will naturally improve. In this framework, tolerance becomes the chief virtue, especially when it comes to affirming someone’s self-defined identity and personal expression. Institutions are met with suspicion, and any form of external authority is rejected. The authentic self reigns supreme.

The problem is, when autonomy becomes your highest good, following Jesus becomes impossible—because He said:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

Autonomy was the original sin in Genesis 3. The serpent’s question—“Did God really say . . . ?”—invited Adam and Eve to become their own judges of truth, to trust their own fleshly desires over God’s commands. That’s the same temptation we face today: Will we take God at His word, or bend the truth to fit how we feel?

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*When autonomy becomes your highest good, following Jesus becomes impossible.*

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This cultural emphasis on expressive individualism doesn’t just reshape how we relate to institutions or authority; it reshapes our understanding of faith itself. When personal experience and self-expression become the ultimate measures of truth, traditional beliefs naturally come under scrutiny—and sometimes rejection. It’s within this environment that a new form of faith emerges, one commonly referred to as “progressive Christianity.”

### WHAT IS A PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN?

Let me be clear—by “progressive Christian,” I don’t mean someone who is politically progressive.

I’m talking about someone who reinterprets Scripture and the historic teachings of the church to make them more acceptable to modern culture—or more comfortable for themselves. It often starts with good intentions: making the gospel “relevant.”

That was me, especially early in ministry—overlooking the

importance of training young Christians in the core tenets of the Christian faith. Instead, I focused on mobilizing them toward action. But what I didn't realize was that the cultural winds beneath us were already shifting. I could no longer assume that the church was defending the foundational truths of Christianity. In fact, there were growing forces—even within the church—working to *change* those core beliefs.

Progressive Christianity often emphasizes the urgency of compassionately loving our neighbor, while downplaying—or even rejecting—core doctrine related to submitting to God's authority and holiness. And that's how the enemy works. He sows weeds among the wheat. He mixes subtle lies with good intentions.

It almost always starts the same way: a slow departure from the historic Christian faith.

Someone says they're looking for a more progressive church—one that better reflects their views on human sexuality, or one that prioritizes racial justice. But when I check in years later, most of these increasingly progressive Christians aren't committed to a local church any longer. They may still call themselves Christians, but they no longer practice their faith—except to fiercely defend the moral framework of expressive individualism.

At first, I thought progressive Christianity was just about different views on hot-button issues like sexuality. But over time, I've learned it's far more. In many cases, progressive Christianity has become the gateway drug for post-Christianity.

## THE RISE OF THE THIRD CULTURE

Philip Rieff, a secular sociologist and cultural commentator, described three types of culture.<sup>8</sup> This framework has helped me understand what's happening spiritually and culturally in our time.

1. **First Culture**—Belief in many gods.

These are pre-Christian societies. People are spiritual and moral. They believe in good and evil. There's a sense of cosmic order and the need to keep the gods happy. This has been the dominant worldview in most of human history.

2. **Second Culture**—Belief in one God.

These are Judeo-Christian cultures rooted in Scripture. They believe God has revealed a rational and sacred order to the universe. Morality is grounded in divine commandments. Peace, security, and human flourishing come from worshiping and obeying the one true God.

3. **Third Culture**—The god of self.

This is our post-Christian world. It defines itself in opposition to the second culture. There is no greater truth. The sacred is deconstructed. The goal is to dismantle all moral boundaries and sacred prohibitions that threaten personal autonomy. Authority lies not in God, but in the self. Everything is contested and reinterpreted through personal experience.<sup>9</sup>

As Rieff saw it, each culture isn't just different—they're in tension. And the tension is growing.

Yet most Christians are unaware of the spiritual danger these dynamics present.

The *danger for Christian second cultures* communicating the gospel to *first cultures* is that they may inadvertently *colonize* them. This has been the critique of some Western missionaries in the last few centuries—imposing cultural norms rather than simply proclaiming Christ.

But when *second-culture Christians* engage *third cultures*, the danger is reversed: They risk being *colonized themselves*—absorbed into the mindset of the culture they’re trying to reach.<sup>10</sup>

The third culture is not passive. It’s deeply evangelistic—offering its own gospel, its own moral framework, and its own version of salvation. Despite presenting itself as inclusive, it doesn’t tolerate alternate views, especially ones that come from the second culture. Instead, it aggressively promotes its own vision of truth, identity, and human flourishing.

In many ways, the third culture has become more committed to making disciples than the church today.

The evangelistic zeal of third cultures can be seen in how society redefines core ideas that were once grounded in Scripture and tradition. Marriage is no longer a covenant rooted in biblical design, but a vehicle for personal expression. Justice is no longer anchored in righteousness and right relationships, but reshaped into performative action or partisan alignment. Even gender identity—once grounded in biology and community—is now fluid, determined by inner feelings.

In each case, the source of authority has shifted: from God to self.

This is where discernment becomes absolutely critical.

Many Christians today are slowly transitioning into the third culture without even realizing it. Why? Because they still speak the language of the second. They were raised in it. They know how to sound biblical. They still talk about Jesus, love,

and justice. But underneath, their worldview is being shaped by third-culture values—autonomy, self-expression, and personal truth. Their faith *looks* familiar, but it no longer operates from the same foundation.

And this is where progressive Christianity often enters in.

### FROM PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY TO POST-CHRISTIANITY

For many, progressive Christianity becomes a layover—a transitional phase between the second and third cultures. It still sounds Christian. It still uses Christian language. But it gradually softens, edits, or redefines core beliefs to stay aligned with the values of the third culture.

John Mark Comer captures this dynamic well when he says: “In my pastoral experience . . . progressive Christianity, not for all people but for most, is a stopover on the way to post-Christianity. Because it can’t hold any robust discipleship. Because it has no ethical stance against the world.”<sup>11</sup>

This is the heart of the problem with progressive Christianity. Many Christians think they are being strategic or inclusive by compromising on certain doctrines to evangelize the third culture. But in reality, they are *being* evangelized. In an effort to engage culture, they become co-opted by it. Let me make it personal: You are being evangelized—daily, if not hourly—by a culture that wants you to compromise your faith.

In my experience, progressive Christians often risk becoming more shaped by progressivism than by historic Christianity. The desire to remain relevant to culture can gradually outweigh faithfulness to Scripture and to God.

As a people pleaser—and someone who deeply desires to reach people who are far from God—I know the temptation to

soften the edges, to make truth more palatable, to trade clarity for connection. But if I'm not careful, that desire to reach others can quietly erode core biblical convictions.

It's true that if you want to lead someone to faith, you have to earn their trust—by showing how much you care, meeting real human needs, and speaking to the issues they care about. But here's the danger: When relevance becomes the highest goal, it won't be long until faithfulness is watered down.

Lies get embedded in our belief systems gradually. We take a good and important principle—like being welcoming, loving, or “doing whatever it takes to help someone feel seen”—and we make it the ultimate goal. Even if it means compromising core biblical truth. But here's the thing: We rarely recognize these moves as compromises. We assume we're being faithful. We convince ourselves that we're just being compassionate, just trying to reach people, just keeping an open mind. All the while, something foundational begins to shift.

There is a spiritual warfare aspect to this, of discerning truth from lies. The enemy will wear people down, but he does this so gradually that we hardly notice. People often compromise one belief at a time until the enemy has his way. In time they either deny their faith entirely or call themselves “Christians” while they retain less and less of the historic commitments until there is almost nothing noticeably Christian about their worldview anymore.<sup>12</sup>

### THE SLOW DRIFT TO DENIAL

This trend is nothing new. Progressive Christian theology has been shaping the West for the past five hundred years. Roger Olson's lengthy *The Journey of Modern Theology* traces the long

arc of this shift.<sup>13</sup> But today, there is a riptide of deconstruction that is growing stronger and stronger each year, and it's pulling many out of the church and into a sea of secularism.

One of the patterns Olson highlights is that progressive Christians usually end up denying the miraculous. He describes the miraculous as God working in supernatural ways that defy science and human comprehension.<sup>14</sup> And this matters—because Christians, by definition, believe in supernatural ministry, the gifts of the Spirit, miraculous healing, and most important one specific miracle that is absolutely central to our faith: the resurrection of Jesus.

This cosmic event stands at the very center of Christianity. Everything hinges on it. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). If you do not believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the Bible is clear: You are not a Christian.

If that is the case, we are just wasting our time with this church thing. We must be discerning. Remember, Jesus didn't say, “Watch out for false atheists, false agnostics, or false pagans.” He said, “Watch out for false *prophets*.”

They are likely in your church. On your podcasts. On your bookshelves. And they sound a lot more convincing than you likely realize.

I've been around the block long enough to see many progressive Christians land in a place where they no longer believe the following:

- Christ is the only way to salvation.
- The Holy Spirit provides supernatural gifts.
- The Bible is the written Word of God.
- Heaven and hell are real places.
- We are sinful and need God.

- Christ’s death on the cross accomplished something literal, not just metaphorical.

Keep poking holes in the gospel, and eventually you’ll end up with a Bible full of them.

The enemy is deceiving millions—not through bold denials, but through a slow erosion of truth, one belief at a time.

It rarely happens in a moment. It’s subtle. It’s incremental. It’s easy to miss until it’s too late.

Over time, these compromises accumulate—until we either abandon our faith or continue calling ourselves “Christian” while believing almost nothing that actually defines it.

So how do we resist the drift? How do we spot these lies before they take root? And what does a faithful, healthy relationship with our culture look like?

### THREE WAYS TO RESPOND TO CULTURE

In his classic book *Christ and Culture*, Richard Niebuhr presents five ways Christians have historically related to culture.<sup>15</sup> Here are three of the most familiar ones:

1. **Go Against Culture.** This is when you resist culture by separating from it or shouting at it. You rage about how the government, the schools, the media, and our laws don’t reflect a Christian worldview. You critique from the sidelines, but you don’t engage. You don’t run for office. You don’t show up in your local school. You don’t offer a better vision on your social media. You just make noise from a distance.

But righteous anger without redemptive action only hardens hearts. This posture may sound like boldness, but

it often lacks love, wisdom, and discernment. There's a difference between contending for truth and simply venting frustration. The gospel doesn't call us to be culture warriors; it calls us to be ambassadors.

2. **Assimilate into Culture.** This is when you try to engage—but end up conforming. You reshape your core beliefs to fit dominant cultural narratives. Your desire for relevance has you sounding less like Scripture and more like the world. This is happening everywhere today and is a major reason I wrote this book.

But cultural conformity isn't the only option. There's a better way—one that blends truth and love, conviction and compassion.

3. **Transform Culture.** This is when you engage culture faithfully—living in the world but not of it. You show up with both conviction and love. You go to the games, the museum, the coffee shop. You might even post a reel on Instagram. But you also draw clear lines. There are things you won't watch, won't comment on, won't participate in—because your purpose isn't popularity. It's transformation.

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*You can live in the world without becoming like the world.*

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Jesus commissioned us to make disciples of all nations. He commanded us to love our neighbors, especially those who don't believe what we believe. And He specifically prayed into this tension before going to the cross:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are

not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (John 17:15–18)

Jesus is sending you *into* the world.

And He will not send you somewhere He won't also equip you to stand.

You can live in the world without becoming like the world. You can engage culture *without compromise*.

### THE SEVEN LIES—AND HOW TO DEFEAT THEM

If you sense the drift happening in you—or in the people you love—know this:

It does *not* have to continue.

You can get reconnected with a vibrant, truth-filled faith more powerful and enduring than the temptations surrounding you. Jesus promised He would never leave you or forsake you. He promised you can have a thriving faith—even in a secular age.<sup>16</sup>

The good news: We don't have to reinvent the wheel to learn how to be *in* the world but not *of* it. We are not the first to try.

For two thousand years, followers of Jesus have endured cultural pressure, spiritual deception, and even persecution—not by hiding or compromising, but by standing firm in the timeless practices that form an unshakable faith.

As Paul exhorted us, “Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to *stand firm* against the schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11, NASB).

In the chapters ahead, we'll explore seven lies Christians

often believe—each one deceptively spiritual but deeply corrosive to a vibrant life with God. These lies don't just remain abstract ideas. Over time, they shape the kind of people we become. They form distorted identities that masquerade as faithfulness, while quietly pulling us away from the way of Jesus.

These are the *counterfeit identities* that emerge when cultural lies go unchallenged in the church:

1. **The Self-Centered Worshiper** who drifts from God-centered devotion and makes faith about personal fulfillment.
2. **The Church Shopper** who treats church as optional and chooses comfort over deep community.
3. **The Lukewarm Believer** who keeps faith private instead of living with bold public witness.
4. **The Selective Christian** who edits Scripture to fit preferences rather than engaging the whole Word of God.
5. **The Armchair Activist** who champions causes online but resists the costly call to biblical justice.
6. **The Skeptical Believer** who replaces revelation with reason and resists the power of the Spirit.
7. **The Divisive Influencer** who mirrors cancel culture instead of practicing radical forgiveness and grace.

In each chapter, I'll not only name the lie and its subtle influence, but expose the identity it forms, and invite you into a better way. A truer way. One shaped not by culture but by Christ.

For each lie, we'll recover a historic spiritual practice—a way to ground our lives in truth and become the kind of people who can truly stand firm.

## HISTORIC SPIRITUAL PRACTICES:

1. **True Worship**—an invitation to a renewed and God-centered faith
2. **Deep Community**—an invitation to be spiritually formed through the local church
3. **Bold Storytelling**—an invitation to share your faith with courage and authenticity
4. **Bible Engagement**—an invitation to dive deep into all of God's Word
5. **Biblical Justice**—an invitation to pursue justice with sacrificial love
6. **Spirit-Filled Living**—an invitation to discover and operate in your spiritual gifts
7. **Radical Forgiveness**—an invitation to practice peacemaking in a divided world

You can resist the lies of the enemy.

You can become a beacon of hope to those searching for truth.

You can follow Jesus and be truly authentic, engaged, loving, and unwavering.

But you must stay alert.

The enemy is cunning, and his lies have been refined over millennia of hating God and deceiving the human heart.

But take heart.

While you're about to see the playbook designed for your destruction, you'll also discover the practices to defeat its lies. Anchored in biblical truth, these practices will lead you to a faith that cannot be shaken.

**UNSHAKABLE**  
**FAITH**

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## WHEN DEVOTION DRIFTS

### *From Self-Centered Faith to God-Centered Worship*

The best thing, where it is possible, is to keep the patient from the serious intention of praying altogether . . . the simplest is to turn their gaze away from Him towards themselves.

—*The Screwtape Letters*, Letter 4

In 2008, I had the privilege of sitting down with Dr. James Lawson, one of the chief architects of the Civil Rights Movement.

Dr. Lawson founded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and championed the nonviolent protesting technique to Martin Luther King, Jr. I hung on his every word.

As we talked, he shared something that has shaped my life since: “Injustice is always justified with a big lie. The prophetic task of the church is to discern the lie and expose it.”

He explained how he, Dr. King, Ella Baker, and others used to go into communities and conduct interviews to discern the root of racial injustice in our country. The first question they would ask was:

“What is the lie most people in this community believe?”

Gradually, they uncovered the big lie at the root of racial injustice: *Some people’s lives are worth more than others.*

But underneath that belief was a deeper distortion—the

age-old tendency to place self at the center, above others and even above God.

Self-centered faith leads to compromised worship.

Racial injustice is rooted in self-centeredness—a sinful belief that my life, my comfort, and my advancement matter more than yours. It’s the elevation of self over neighbor. And that’s why addressing it required more than policy change—it required spiritual awakening.

So, Dr. Lawson and the others began asking a second critical question in those communities: “What is the spiritual *solution* to that lie?”

What they discovered was both theologically profound and nationally resonant. The antidote to the big lie of racial injustice was a foundational truth—one rooted in Genesis 1 and reflected in the best ideals of the U.S. Constitution.

The truth: All people are created equal.

From the opening pages of Scripture, we see that every human being is made in the image of God—the *imago Dei*—and therefore carries equal worth, dignity, and value. This truth, enshrined in the Constitution, became the moral and spiritual imperative behind the civil rights movement.

Pastors and organizers addressed the foundational lie by appealing to two powerful sources of authority: Scripture and the Constitution. And in doing so, they reminded the nation that true justice begins with true worship—putting God, not self, at the center.

Sin runs rampant when lies pervade. Freedom and justice reign when we overcome lies with truth.

When we planted The District Church, we followed a similar playbook. We were not just starting a weekly service; we were seeking to build a church for the city. A church that would address the real, often unspoken, spiritual lies shaping people's lives. So we hit the streets and asked over two hundred people two simple but revealing questions:

1. What is the lie most people in our city believe?
2. What is the spiritual solution to that lie?

What we heard back was incredibly consistent. The lie wasn't loud or obvious—but it was everywhere. It went something like this:

*You can change the world on your own.*

The problem facing our church was not that people were opposed to community. But there was a pervasive sense that community was optional. That what really mattered was individual effort—earning the right degrees, building the perfect résumé, making the right connections. Then, and only then, could you make a difference.

At first, this way of thinking sounded noble. Ambitious. Even inspiring. But as we considered it more deeply, we realized the problem wasn't just disconnection from others. The problem was a deeper spiritual drift—one that placed the self, rather than God, at the center.

That's the danger of unexamined cultural lies: they often sound like truth. But over time, they quietly reshape what we believe about purpose, success, and even God. And if we're not careful, they begin to inform not only how we live but how we worship.

### THE LIE: IT'S ALL ABOUT ME

The first and most foundational lie Christians are tempted to believe today is: *It's all about me.*

We would never say it out loud. Few would ever claim to believe this lie directly. But it shows up—in our decisions, our prayers, our priorities.

We choose churches based on how they meet our needs and make life easier or more convenient, rather than on how they help us better glorify God. We pray mainly about our personal goals, not God's purposes. We prioritize convenience and comfort over sacrifice and obedience. And it's so easy to embrace, because even though it is straight out of the world, it has been unquestionably accepted in the culture of most families and churches. When I believe it's all about me, I will soon buy into the lie that I can change the world not just apart from community, but apart from *God*.

This idea that we can live independently from God isn't new. It's the very first lie ever told. Back in the Garden of Eden, the serpent said to Eve, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" Followed by, "You will not certainly die . . . your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (Genesis 3:1, 4–5).

The devil's strategy from the beginning is to make us think we can be like God and thus live independently from Him. The devil wants us to shift our gaze away from God and toward ourselves and our own plans. C. S. Lewis captures this tactic masterfully in *The Screwtape Letters*, where the senior demon Screwtape writes to his nephew Wormwood, saying: "The best thing, where it is possible, is to keep the patient [that's us] from the serious intention of praying altogether . . . to turn their gaze away from Him towards themselves."<sup>1</sup>

Slowly, subtly, our faith becomes centered around our needs, our goals, and our comfort. We begin to treat God as a divine assistant rather than the Sovereign King. He becomes the One who blesses our dreams rather than the One who defines them.

This lie quietly shifts God from the center of the story to the margins. It recasts Him as a supporting character in our pursuit of success, rather than the Author and Perfecter of our faith.

This first lie is the one that most threatens our ability to live with unshakable faith in a secular age. It is also the most difficult one to discern. It's the hardest to recognize, because it doesn't feel wrong. It hides behind good things: self-care, ambition, even calling. It sounds like wisdom, earns applause, and slips into our prayers unnoticed—quietly shifting the focus from God to ourselves.

Unfortunately, this lie doesn't just affect what we do. Over time, it reshapes who we are. It forms a distorted identity—one that leads to spiritual disconnection and a faith that can't endure life's storms.

### **THE COUNTERFEIT IDENTITY: THE SELF-CENTERED WORSHIPER**

The enemy's goal isn't just to tempt us into sin—it's to reshape our identity by distorting our worship. Worship determines what—or who—is at the center of our lives. When the center shifts from God to self, everything else begins to unravel.

While the lie that it's all about me may not lead to open rebellion, it does something far more dangerous: It leads to subtle redefinition. We may still believe in God. We may still sing the songs. But slowly, we begin to believe that the purpose

of faith is to serve our dreams, our goals, and our fulfillment. Our worship then becomes compromised as the object of our worship has quietly changed.

And that's how a counterfeit identity is formed.

A counterfeit identity is a version of the self shaped more by cultural values and personal desires than by God's truth. It may still use spiritual language. It may even look impressive on the outside. But it's no longer rooted in surrender. It tells us that our value comes from what we accomplish, how we feel, or how others see us. It reframes "you were made for a purpose" into "your purpose is your personal fulfillment."

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*The enemy's goal isn't just to tempt us into sin—it's to reshape our identity by distorting our worship.*

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Over time this inevitably leads to more anxiety, isolation, and insecurity. We strive endlessly for meaning, but never find rest. We chase fulfillment on our terms, but end up malnourished spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. In trying to create ourselves, we disconnect from the One who made us—and that disconnection hinders true flourishing.

The danger is not just spiritual—it's personal and relational. Modern research paints a sobering picture:

- One study found that loneliness shortens a person's life by fifteen years—the equivalent impact of smoking fifteen cigarettes a day.<sup>2</sup>
- According to *Harvard Magazine*, 61 percent of Americans report feeling lonely.<sup>3</sup>
- Young adults are the most affected. Gen Z scores the highest for loneliness, despite being the most digitally

connected generation.<sup>4</sup>

- Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has declared loneliness a national epidemic, stating, “Social connection is a fundamental human need, as essential to survival as food, water, and shelter.”<sup>5</sup>

These findings confirm what Scripture has long told us: When we center life around self we lose the very connection our souls were made for. A counterfeit identity doesn’t just fall short—it erodes our joy, community, and well-being.

This identity shift rarely happens all at once. It’s slow. Subtle. It doesn’t usually begin with a rejection of God—it begins with a redefinition of His role. We may still go through the motions. We may still show up to church. But internally, something has shifted. We’ve replaced God as the center of our story and put ourselves there instead.

This is how the enemy gains ground—not by turning us away from faith, but by reshaping it around us. By turning God into a means to an end, rather than the end Himself. And once that lie takes root, everything starts to change. Our prayers become more about control than communion. Our worship becomes a performance instead of a posture. And without realizing it, we’ve traded a true identity for a counterfeit one.

That’s how the Self-Centered Worshiper is formed—not through rebellion but through quiet drift.

True worship begins with surrender. It puts God at the center. It’s rooted in awe, not entitlement—in reverence, not performance. But when our worship shifts from God-centered to self-centered, something subtle yet significant happens: Our identity begins to change.

Instead of seeing ourselves as beloved children of God—

created in His image and called to reflect His glory—we begin to define ourselves by our achievements, our emotions, or the approval of others. We carry the weight of self-justification and image management. The result is exhaustion and insecurity.

But when God is at the center, our identity is no longer something we have to earn or curate. It is something we receive. We live not *for* validation but *from* it. This shift allows us to live with humility and confidence, knowing that our worth is anchored in something unshakable: the love of a holy God who has called us His own.

The Self-Centered Worshiper still believes in God, but primarily in a God who exists to serve their needs. They pray, but mainly when something's wrong. They worship, but only when the music or message stirs their emotions. Their view of God is functional, not relational.

God has become a part of their life, rather than the center of it.

I've experienced the destructive nature of this lie more times than I can count. When I'm feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities, or when things aren't going my way, I can start treating prayer as a way to control outcomes rather than surrender to God's will. I'll still show up. I may even be leading others. But underneath, I'm operating as if God exists to support my agenda—not the other way around. I'm doing ministry *for* Him instead of *with* Him—and under His authority.

And here's the tricky part: It's entirely possible to adopt this identity and still look very spiritual on the outside. You might still be serving others. Still posting Scripture on social media. Still leading a small group. But underneath all that activity is a subtle shift: God has become a means to an end. And that end, more often than not, is *you*—your reputation, your fulfillment,

your influence.

Even so, Scripture and experience tell us that when we put ourselves at the center of the story, we end up with shallow roots. We may see quick fruit. We may even gain followers or influence. But our souls become dry, our passion becomes unsustainable, and our faith becomes fragile, built on the shifting sand of self rather than the Rock.

This self-centered identity, once normalized, becomes a filter for everything. Worship is measured by how it makes *me* feel. Church is evaluated by whether *my* needs are met. Obedience becomes optional if it interferes with *my* plan. Even our view of justice or service gets co-opted by the pursuit of personal fulfillment, rather than Spirit-led sacrifice.

But here's the good news: God is inviting us to something deeper and better. His kindness leads us to repentance. He gently but firmly calls us back to the place where worship is more about *who He is* than what we can get from Him.

When we recenter our lives around Jesus—not just as Savior, but as Lord—everything changes. Our dreams get refined. Our motives are purified. Our worship becomes vibrant. And we begin to live with a freedom and power that doesn't come from chasing our own greatness, but from surrendering to His.

Self-centered worship hides behind a mask of piety. It may look composed—even reverent—but underneath it's driven by pride, self-importance, and control. It approaches God with an unspoken demand to be seen, affirmed, or rewarded.

But God-centered worship has a totally different posture. We come with open hands and humble hearts. We kneel in reverence. We lift our hands in surrender. We open ourselves to receive.

### RE-CENTERING OUR WORSHIP

Who—or what—we worship shapes everything. If the enemy can distort our worship, he can distort our identity, our desires, and ultimately, our lives.

This is why idolatry is one of the most dominant themes in the Old Testament. Because at its core, idolatry is false worship—giving our primary affection to something other than God. And today, it rarely looks like golden calves or carved images. More often, it looks like elevating good things to *ultimate* things: success, family, reputation, freedom.

When we believe the lie that “it’s all about me,” idolatry takes root even in a Christian’s life. When God is no longer at the center, something else always fills that space. And most often, that “something” is us. We become the object of our own worship.

But this pattern isn’t new. It’s ancient. That’s why the very first of the Ten Commandments is this: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). We were made to worship. The question isn’t *if* we will worship—it’s *who* we will worship. Repeatedly, Israel forgot this. They turned to the idols of surrounding nations. And each time, God raised up prophets to call them back—not just from false religion, but from misplaced worship. Because when our view of God is diminished, we naturally elevate something else—and more often than not, that’s ourselves.

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*Who—or what—we worship shapes everything.*

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This is exactly what we see in our cultural moment today with expressive individualism—the belief that the highest pur-

pose in life is to discover, define, and express your own identity. In this worldview, the self is sacred. The path to wholeness is found not in surrender to God, but in asserting your truth, pursuing your desires, and being affirmed for who you feel yourself to be.

We can see this influence most clearly in how some churches talk about sin. Instead of naming it as rebellion against a holy God, they reframe sin as a “mistake” or “unhealthy decision.” Influenced by this cultural moment, sermons start to prioritize self-esteem over surrender, and affirmation over transformation. Conviction is softened. Repentance is optional. The gospel becomes a tool for personal growth, not a call to die to self and follow Jesus.

Now, let’s be clear: God created each of us uniquely. Personal growth, creativity, and authenticity reflect His image when they’re rightly ordered. The danger is not in expressing who we are, but in defining ourselves apart from God. The problem arises when self-expression replaces God’s authority and becomes our highest aim.

There’s a kind of self-expression that flows from intimacy with God—a musician writing songs that give voice to both pain and hope, or a teacher using her voice to encourage others and serve with integrity. These expressions reflect the image of a Creator who made us with purpose. But there’s also a kind of self-expression that cuts God out of the picture entirely. It says, “This is who I am—take it or leave it,” and demands affirmation from others to feel whole. Instead of glorifying God, it places the self at the center and asks others to orbit around it.

We see this especially in progressive Christianity, where one of the greatest fears is *excluding* someone. That fear often comes from a sincere desire to reflect God’s love. But when

inclusion is elevated above repentance, and grace is divorced from holiness, the gospel gets hollowed out. Our greatest problem isn't exclusion from one another—it's separation from God. And that separation can only be healed through repentance and faith in Jesus.

It all comes back to how we see ourselves—and who we worship. What is our starting point? Are we essentially good people in need of affirmation? Or are we broken sinners in need of redemption?

A biblical worldview starts with God, not us. It removes us from the center of the story. And that re-centering is itself an act of worship and repentance. It's a reversal of the original error of Adam and Eve, which is to reach for God's throne and make ourselves the focus.

Repentance begins by acknowledging, "I am not God. He is. I am not the center. He is." And when that truth takes root, worship begins to flow—not as an emotional reaction, but as a right and natural response.

As Psalm 130:3 says, "If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?" None of us deserves to be in God's presence. Yet because of Jesus, we're invited in.

That's what makes worship so powerful. It's not just singing songs. It's realigning our hearts with reality. And reality is this: There is one God, and we are not Him.

And that's not bad news—it's the best news. Because if we were at the center, everything would rise and fall on our strength, our wisdom, our ability to hold it all together. But it doesn't. God is God—and He is good, sovereign, just, and merciful. He invites us to surrender not to lose ourselves, but to find life in Him.

**THE TRUTH: IT STARTS WITH GOD**

This truth reorients everything: Life isn't about finding yourself—it's about returning to God.

The lie says, "It's all about me."

But the truth is, it all starts—and ends—with Him.

This better way recognizes we were made to revolve around His glory. To live into His story.

He's not waiting for you to perform or prove your worth. He's inviting you to come back to the true center—His presence and His truth.

This is the clarity we need in a culture of confusion: God is not on the edges. He is at the center. And in His mercy, He draws near—not to affirm our self-centered ways, but to rescue us from them.

From the Garden of Eden to the tabernacle in the wilderness, from the manger in Bethlehem to the Spirit dwelling within us today, God has always been drawing near to His people. Not because we deserve it, but because He desires intimacy with us. He comes near to call us back to Himself.

Jesus' first public message made that clear: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 4:17). The kingdom drew near not because we found God, but because God came to find us. He stepped into our story to re-center it around Himself.

The apostle Paul echoed this truth in Athens: "God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us" (Acts 17:27). He is near—not to orbit our lives, but to invite us into His.

But His nearness demands a response. The presence of a holy God calls us to more than inspiration—it calls us to repentance. Worship begins when we step off the throne and see

Jesus already seated there.

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*Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe.*

—Hebrews 12:28 (NLT)

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Scripture shows us that holiness is both a gift and a demand. God is the one who makes us holy—that’s the gift. But He also calls us to live in holiness—that’s the demand.

His holiness draws us in, but it also calls us higher. It’s like opposite poles of a magnet working together: there’s a pull and a push. *Come close . . . but take off your sandals.* Think of Moses before the burning bush—invited into God’s presence, yet reminded of God’s majesty.<sup>6</sup> That’s the paradox of holiness: It welcomes us with intimacy but confronts us with reverence.

And this is good for us. God’s holiness is like the love of a parent—both tender and demanding. A loving parent doesn’t affirm everything a child does; they guide, correct, and call their child to maturity. In the same way, holiness refuses to leave us as we are. It pulls us out of complacency. It lifts our vision. It shapes us into who we were created to be—not by shaming us, but by drawing us into something better.

True worship holds both truths at once: God is near, and God is holy. That’s what reshapes us. That’s what pulls us out of self-centered faith and reorients us around Him.

As Psalm 145:18 says, “The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.” Not to all who have it figured out. Not to all who have a perfect past. But to those who come in truth and humility.

When we come to God in truth, everything changes. Our worship becomes honest, not performative. Faith becomes integrated, not compartmentalized. Identity becomes rooted in Christ, not centered on self.

This is what it means to be a True Worshiper. Jesus said, “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks” (John 4:23).

That’s the vision. Not perfect worshipers. Not impressive worshipers. But *true* ones.

People whose hearts are humbled, whose lives are surrendered, and whose gaze is fixed on the only one worthy.

And the beauty of it all? God is seeking you. He’s not repelled by your past or put off by your questions, but wants to be known by you—and is drawing near to call you back to a relationship that re-centers you.

### **THE COMMITMENT: GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP (TRUE WORSHIP)**

One verse that’s anchored me for years is Matthew 6:33: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (NKJV). It’s a simple but powerful reminder: When God is at the center, everything else finds its place. I’ve come back to that truth again and again—in leadership, in parenting, in finances, and especially in seasons of uncertainty.

That’s the heart of a True Worshiper: the humble confession, “I am not the center of the story—Jesus is.” As Paul wrote, “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1). True worship begins with repentance and leads to re-

newal. It's not about perfect appearances or polished performances. It's about bringing your whole heart to God—especially the parts you've been tempted to keep to yourself.

Do you believe that a life of repentance and worship leads to renewal? That refusing to worship anything other than God brings a deeper kind of wholeness? I am not suggesting that true worship will make you wealthy. But I am saying it will satisfy you in a way nothing else can. Because true worship connects your heart to the heart of your Creator.

This is why I love worshiping alongside those who are just beginning their journey—people in recovery, people off the streets, people who've hit bottom and found grace. There's a rawness and a desperation in their worship that reminds me of what God is really after: a surrendered heart.

Because when you give God everything, worship stops being something you just do at church—it becomes a way of life. A rhythm. A posture of the soul.

You begin to see all of life as sacred. Work becomes worship, as you trust God in both your effort and your outcomes. Rest becomes worship, as you remember He is God and you are not. Your decisions, your relationships, your finances, your time—they all become daily offerings laid before the One who is worthy.

Even your morning routines shift. Instead of starting your day by processing your stresses, you start by asking: "God, what's on Your heart today?"

And as that shift happens, you begin to find what you've been searching for all along, not in self-promotion or self-fulfillment, but in self-surrender: the peace, joy, and purpose that come only through the abiding presence of God.

That's what it means to resist the lie and embrace the truth. To move from being a Self-Centered Worshiper to becoming a

True Worshiper.

### WALKING IT OUT

For many years, our church has begun the new year with twenty-one days of prayer and fasting. Every January, hundreds of people wake up early to pray and worship together on Zoom. We fast from meals or media, not as a ritual, but as a way of clearing space. Making room for God at the center again. It's not just a spiritual reset. It's a re-centering of the heart.

People often begin those twenty-one days weary—burned out from the holidays, burdened by their goals. But slowly, as they worship, something shifts. Schedules change. Screens fade. And surrender begins. That's the power of corporate worship. It reminds us we're not the point. God is.

And when your life becomes centered around worship, it begins to overflow. You don't have to manufacture passion or chase meaning. You simply live in rhythm with the One you were made for—and others notice.

Worship also becomes personal. One practice that's helped anchor me is the ACTS prayer framework: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. It's not complicated, but it reorients me. It helps me begin not with my needs, but with God's greatness.

Another practice? Simply showing up for worship—even when I don't feel like it. Especially when I'm not leading or serving. There's something powerful about singing with the people of God, even on the days we feel dry. That act of showing up reminds me I'm not alone. And reminds me of what's true.

Worship doesn't need a stage. It doesn't even need a song.

It just needs a surrendered heart. You don't have to be a pastor or a musician to be a True Worshiper. You just have to give God what's already His—your attention, your affection, your life.

So start simple. Show up. Sing loud. Confess honestly. Kneel in prayer when you rise or before you sleep. Lift your hands when you pray. But most of all, surrender. Let your worship be love, not performance.

And when you do, you'll discover something beautiful: Your life will become a song that others can hear—even when no music is playing.

### THE DEPTH GOD DESIRES

We are living in a cultural moment where we've mistaken vulnerability for repentance.

Vulnerability says, "Here's what I'm going through."

Repentance says, "Here's what I'm turning from."

Vulnerability keeps it real.

Repentance keeps it real by confessing sin and turning back to God.

If there's no true repentance, then we're simply managing sin, not crucifying it.

This is exactly what the enemy wants. As Screwtape says to his junior devil: "As long as he retains externally the habits of a Christian he can still be made to think of himself as one . . . And while he thinks that, we do not have to contend with the explicit repentance of a definite, fully recognized, sin, but only with his vague, though uneasy, feeling that he hasn't been doing very well lately."<sup>7</sup>

True revival always begins with repentance.

What started as an ordinary Wednesday morning chapel service at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, quickly became something no one could have expected. Without any famous speakers or promotion, students lingered in prayer and worship—and they never really stopped. What followed was a multi-week, Spirit-led gathering filled with prayer, repentance, and lives being surrendered to Jesus.

Word of what was happening spread quickly. Soon students from other colleges began arriving, drawn by the hunger and holiness of what God was doing. In the days that followed, people came from across the country—and even from as far as Russia and Japan. Media outlets showed up to cover the story, but the real headline was this: Lives were being changed. Furthermore, it was a movement marked not by hype, but by humility.<sup>8</sup>

And what marked that hunger? A shift in center. Jesus wasn't just included—He was enthroned.

We felt the ripple effect of that revival in our own church in Washington, D.C. Recent Asbury graduates, visiting students, and others who had experienced the outpouring brought a renewed hunger for God with them.

There was no big stage, no celebrity preacher, no LED wall. Just prayer, worship, and repentance—with Jesus at the center.

I watched as the same hunger began to grow in our community. Students lingered after services. People confessed sin more freely in their small groups. The focus wasn't on better programs or better platforms, but on God Himself.

Because when Jesus is at the center, everything changes.

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*True revival always begins with repentance.*

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And that's the heart of this chapter: True worship displaces the lie at the heart of self-centered faith and replaces it with the truth: It's all about Him.

So, here's the invitation: Don't settle for a version of Christianity that leaves you unchanged. Don't embrace a faith that asks nothing of you. Don't reduce worship to your preferences.

Instead, let your life be marked by full surrender. Let repentance become your rhythm. Let worship reshape your identity.

Don't be content to admire Jesus—follow Him.

Now more than ever, we need True Worshipers. People who carry the fire of God's presence into a culture that's drifting from the truth. People who fear God more than man. People who will speak with grace and live with boldness.

Yes, you were born to change the world—but not in your own strength, and not for your own glory.

You were born to worship the one true God.

Start there, and everything else will follow.

But know that this kind of faith doesn't grow in isolation—it flourishes in community. That's why the next lie we must confront is this: "Church is optional."

**DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS***Lie 1: It's All About Me***1. Reflecting on the Lie**

Why do you think the lie “It’s all about me” is so pervasive in today’s culture? In what ways have you seen this mindset show up in your own life or in the lives of those around you?

**2. Self-Centered Worship**

How does the “It’s all about me” mindset affect the way we approach worship and prayer? In contrast, what does it look like to come before God with a posture of surrender and awe?

**3. The Enemy’s Strategy**

How does the enemy use this lie (it’s all about me) to draw us away from intimacy with God? What signs might indicate that we’re slipping into this mindset, even subtly?

**4. Counterfeit Identity vs. True Identity**

How has your understanding of your identity in Christ grown or changed over time? What helps you resist the pull toward self-centered definitions of identity?

**5. Scriptural Truths About God’s Nearness**

Several scriptures affirm that God is near (e.g., Joshua 1:9, Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 41:10). Which one speaks most to you right now, and why? How can these truths help realign your worship and identity?

**6. Importance of Repentance**

Why is repentance so essential in resisting the lie that “it’s all about me”? Can you share a time when repentance deepened your relationship with God or brought freedom?

7. **Vulnerability vs. Repentance**

What's the difference between being vulnerable and truly repenting? Why is it important that our confession leads to transformation—not just emotional honesty?

8. **Identifying Modern Idols**

What are some common idols today that can subtly take God's place in our hearts (e.g., success, approval, comfort)? How can we regularly examine and guard our hearts from misplaced worship?

9. **Practical Steps to True Worship**

What are some intentional ways you can cultivate a lifestyle of true worship—one that places God at the center? What spiritual practices help keep your heart aligned?

10. **Living Out the Truth**

How can you live out the truth that God is near in your everyday life—in your relationships, work, and witness? What would it look like to live with greater awareness of His presence?