

# **Zombie Church**

**Breathing Life Back into the Body of Christ**

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*Zombie Church: Breathing Life Back into the Body of Christ*  
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# Preface

There are Zombie churches among us. The undead church. Where undead persons feast. Where genuine life has been lost, and in its place is something . . . scary. Lifeless.

In some churches, the loss of life is obvious; in others it is more subtle. Have you ever walked into a church where everything appeared normal? Everyone was smiling and seemed so happy because, after all, smiling at church is what Christians are supposed to do. Everyone was personable, but no one was really personal. It might even have seemed like everyone's friendliness kept you at arm's length. How many people greeted you at church but never really took the time to get to know you? Have you ever gone to a church service where nothing seemed wrong *per se* but you just felt like *something* was missing?

Some of us have not only wandered into these churches, but we have sung in their worship, listened to their sermons, and returned week after week. Some of us have become part of these churches. Some of us have lived our whole lives in a Zombie church.

Of course, we can only endure this for so long. In recent years there has been a steady movement away from organized religion. Christian writers are becoming more critical of the church and less hopeful about its survival in the future. Some have even gone so far as to say that the organized church must be done away with.<sup>1</sup> In *Revolution*, George Barna writes: "If the local church is the hope of the world, then the world has no hope."<sup>2</sup>

When Christian leaders are telling people to abandon the church like a sinking ship or implying as much, then the problem has reached a whole new level. It's easy to look at the church and all of its flaws and to become jaded; when the church gets things wrong, it's easy to forget about what the church gets right. The church was instituted by God and He has a plan for her. Certainly, the church isn't perfect, but there's still hope for her.

I'm sure most of us have heard someone say, "I can't stand the church because it's full of liars and hypocrites." This is, of course, a direct result of the fact that the people who go to church *are* liars, hypocrites, and fakes. Mahatma Gandhi nailed the problem: "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." Honestly, there is no better way to identify the problem than that. Christians are not enough like Christ.

"The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips then walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle."<sup>3</sup> The world does not understand verbal devotion without appropriate action. Those who say one thing and do another are labeled as "hypocrites." If we honestly look at how those in the church act sometimes, the accusation seems fair. We claim to be followers of Jesus imitating His life, but that is exactly the problem. What we have is imitation life. So many Christians do not live their lives with Jesus at the center. Our words and our deeds are not projecting the same message, and so people walk away from both. The church is infected. This is the condition we need to cure. My purpose in writing this is not to complain; there are plenty of resources

available if that is what you are seeking. My goal is to address a problem, reveal its significance, and illuminate the path to healing this condition that faces the contemporary church.

As we look at the problems facing the church, the easiest solution does seem to be to walk away. But simply walking away from the church because she is broken is not what God would have us do. The church is Christ's bride, and we are Christ's followers; shouldn't we then fight for the bride of our Lord?

The church is not a decaying corpse, but she is sick with a disease. There is an antidote, however, and rather than deserting the church, we ought to find a way to cure the disease running through her body.

## Why Talk About Zombies?

I confess: I have a taste for cheesy horror films. These are movies that lack the skill or budget to actually be scary, and despite their great efforts end up as more of a comedy with monsters than anything else. Bad acting, bad dialogue, typically a bad story, and bad costume design can make for a good laugh. My favorites of these films are zombie movies.

Most zombie movies try to offer a unique explanation for where the zombies originate. The explanation is rarely, if ever, satisfying, but *something* happens and all of a sudden people start turning into zombies, and *somehow* the infection spreads. The one common thread with zombie movies is the nature of the zombies themselves. Neither dead nor alive they are beings trapped in a mindless existence.

Zombies do not produce anything. They do not accomplish anything. All they do is wander around aimlessly, consuming everything in their path (including non-zombies). They are a corrupt and destructive force that taints all they come in contact with. Zombies act like they are alive, but they are dead. They just don't know it yet.

Yes, there are zombies in our churches. Not only that, but this seems to be a growing trend. The doors are open, the people show up faithfully, the songs are sung. But that's it. So many American churches today are filled with people whose spiritual lives consist of little more than showing up to church on Sunday morning and, for the "super spiritual," maybe once in the middle of the week. We have become experts in going through the motions, but these motions are all we go through. I can't help but wonder if God didn't have something more in mind for His church. It seems that something is missing.

In looking at the church in North America today and comparing it to the church in Acts 2 and 4, I can't help but think that we have lost the basic foundation of what it means to be the church.<sup>4</sup> I have heard horror stories (no pun intended) of churches splitting because two families couldn't get along or factions didn't agree on a method of evangelism. Shouldn't we have more important things to worry about? When our mission as the body of Christ can be overshadowed by something like building decorations, we have gotten onto the wrong path.

It seems we make Jesus the Lord of Sunday morning, then kick Him off the throne as we leave the church building. It's sort of like having a one-night stand with Jesus every week. We sing songs like "I surrender all," when we really mean "I surrender some."

## Objective

I have gone to church my whole life. I have sat in the seats. I have done the song and dance. I have prayed, read the Scriptures, given communion meditations, served communion, shown up for special events, participated in the greeting time, and both listened to and preached hundreds of sermons. Jesus has been a part of my life since I was a child. I have done just about everything there is to do inside the church walls. I know how to go through the motions as well as anyone. But I'm tired of that. I'm bored.

I'm bored coming to the same services every week singing songs, preaching sermons, and going home. I want something more out of church, and I suspect most of you do too.

Boredom comes from a lack of purpose. When someone without Christ gets bored, it makes sense; they are living life with no purpose. But what about the bored Christian? I think the reason we get bored in the church is not because we do not have a purpose but because we have forgotten our purpose. When a church exists without purpose, it slowly turns into a Zombie church.

In this book, we will look at the church in terms of what it is, what it ideally should be, and how to traverse the gap. People are starting to realize that there is something wrong with the church. We may not all recognize what the problem is, but clearly we are starting to feel that there is one. My goal is to identify what is missing and to look at possible ways to fix it so that the church can become what it was created by God to be. The church is the bride of Christ, and that alone makes her worth fighting for.

**Zombie churches might not look any different from healthy churches,  
but they are missing an essential ingredient: life.**

This book should be a reminder of the purpose and function of the church so we may be better able to identify the healthy churches from the dying ones. Zombie churches might not look any different from healthy churches, but they are missing an essential ingredient: life. Before we can fix the problem, however, we must identify it. If there is a disease that creates Zombie churches, my hope is that this book will help lead us to the cure.

The church is the Bride of Christ, the fellowship of God's children. It is not an archaic or optional assembly. In other words, it is not something to give up on, no matter how much it resembles the living dead. Doctors do not just give up on sick patients because they are unhealthy; good doctors search for the problem, the root cause, and try to cure it. God is gracious and is willing to breathe life back into stagnant structures if we will truly seek His presence. This book isn't an epitaph but an elixir. The condition that besets the church is certainly life threatening, but the church isn't dead yet.

# Warning Signs

Imagine getting ready to attend a new church for the first time on a Sunday morning. You wake up early, the sun is shining, the birds are chirping. You get dressed in your best outfit and head downstairs. You breathe deeply of fresh morning air. Your wonderful children are awake and smiling, not a hair out of place. You sit down to a delicious breakfast together. You tell your children how much fun they are going to have learning about Jesus and making new friends.

Since you have just moved to this new community, you yourself have been waiting all week for this opportunity to build friendships. You find yourself filled with a nervous excitement as you start the car. On the way to the church your heart starts to race as you imagine the awesome people you are going to meet. You pull into the parking lot. You hold hands with your youngest as you walk up to the beautiful double glass doors. You smile at the greeter. He silently places a bulletin in your hands.

You expected to find life in an engaging community, but rather than a warm greeting you are met with blank expressions of complete indifference. People flow by as if you are invisible, or perhaps a nuisance. You try to figure out where you are supposed to go but no one stops to help you. The halls clear and there you are, awkwardly trying to find your place. You reach the sanctuary and enter. Acutely aware of the whispering going on all around, you make your way to a seat. As you sit you think, *Here we go, now that we're settled in someone will greet us.*

The music begins to play and everyone around you starts to sing. They sing songs about joy, but it appears that they forgot to tell their faces. The minister gets up to speak; he prays and then begins. His message turns into one big, long complaint. He drags on for what seems like days, criticizing how everyone lives their lives and whining about the choices other people make that he doesn't agree with. At the end of it all, you feel tired and beat up.

The service ends and everyone stands up and shuffles out. You leave feeling like an ex who showed up for a family reunion, and you start to wonder if maybe there is something wrong with you. When you left the house you felt invigorated and excited with the possibilities. When you return you feel like someone has sucked the life out of you. Have you ever been there?

So many churches in America today have lost sight of their purpose. It is this loss of purpose that turns our churches into Zombie churches. People come expecting to find life and what they get is . . . something else. It's bad enough walking into a room and being attacked by a horde of brain-hungry zombies, but on a *Sunday morning, in church*—that is the worst! It is also probably the last thing you'd expect. We don't expect to be welcomed at the post office, but we expect civility. We don't expect a warm embrace at McDonald's, but we do expect service. When we go to a church and leave without experiencing Christian fellowship, there is a problem. Even those who are not ardent church-goers can sense that something is missing.

I know most of us have never had a real-life zombie encounter. This is likely because zombies are not real. At least most educated people in Haiti would probably agree, though belief in zombies among the rest of Haitians is apparently universal. This isn't surprising since zombies appear in the stories and

folklore of Haiti and are a legendary phenomenon in voodoo cult. Researchers studying Haitian culture have even analyzed “zombie powder” in an attempt to explain a particular incident of zombiism some thirty years ago.<sup>1</sup> In any case, it might seem strange to use creatures that (probably) do not actually exist as a metaphor for the church, but the similarities are striking.

I’m going to assume that you are not a zombie expert. So what is a zombie? A zombie is defined (yes, by the dictionary) as “the body of a dead person given the semblance of life.”<sup>2</sup> Zombies are dead bodies faking life.

When we look at the characteristics of zombies, you might start seeing them in the church . . . maybe even in the mirror. Zombies are creatures that, at least at a distance, appear to be living human beings. At closer proximity, it is apparent that they are “undead” (behaving as if they are alive even though they are not). Not really living, not really dead. This is the point that connects with the church. When I use “dead” in reference to the church, I don’t so much mean hellbound and hopeless (though that may occasionally be true) but having lost a connection to life. Zombies only imitate life. Their actions and the externals are right, but there is something missing from the inside. Left untreated, zombiism is fatal to the church.

Living churches exist. You can walk in the doors of a living church and feel overwhelmed with the presence of the Spirit of God. But not all churches are alive. Life is found in what a church does with Jesus and how they go about following Him in their community. When the church neglects the commission of Jesus—stops ministering to the poor and the hurting and stops sharing the love of God with others—then it stops living. It just exists and keeps on existing. Undead. How can a church offer the eternal life of God if it does not have life in its midst?

So what makes a church body living or dead? The same thing that makes a human body living or dead: whether or not there is a spirit residing in it. Zombies still have a body—they often still look the same—but they are disconnected from the spirit. *The Spirit*. The Holy Spirit is like a six-year-old after a candy frenzy. He doesn’t sit still for very long. He is an innovator: prompting movement, triggering change, instigating adaptation, mixing things up. And we need to keep up. The Holy Spirit is always culturally relevant. When He speaks, He speaks in a way the people understand. He is the same, but He is willing to alter the venue and style of His communication to fit with the people He is communicating to.

**Jesus calls us to a journey that leads to eternity.**

Jesus does not call us to a localized destination where knowing and believing all the right things grants you access to eternity regardless of how you live. Jesus calls us to a journey that leads to eternity. It’s not a destination; it’s a lifelong adventure.

Food is also necessary for human life—both physical and spiritual. You’ve heard the saying, “You are what you eat!” Life or death is a result of what we feed on. Living Christians feed on the life that Jesus offers while zombies feed on rules and rituals. If you are feeding on Jesus, then naturally you are becoming more like Him. If you are feeding on traditions or laws or denominational differences, then what you are eating doesn’t sustain life.

## Dead Churches Faking Life

The church is supposed to offer the source of eternal life, Jesus. Some do exactly that. Sadly, others do not. Even in places where the lawn is mowed, the music plays, and meetings are scheduled, life can be absent. Just because things are moving does not mean there is true life. Some churches have hollow motions. Healing is not administered, joy is not experienced, minds are not edified, and people are not changed. One of the best tests to see if a church is truly alive is to ask the question, if the church closed its doors would anyone outside of it even notice?

A Zombie church is any church that has lost its focus on God. The Spirit of God is what gives life to a church. It is not a matter of going through the right motions that conjures life in the Spirit. Our efforts to control the Holy Spirit are like a man standing in the middle of a river trying to control its flow by sticking his hands in the water. The Holy Spirit is not a resource to be tapped or harnessed but a power source to remain connected to. The life He offers comes from giving control over to Him. (Yes, the Holy Spirit is a “He” rather than “it”; He is just as personal and as much God as the Father and the Son.) Instead of trying to control the river with feeble hands, the man should fall back into it and allow the powerful currents to carry him. Believers need to move *with* the Spirit.

When the church fails to adapt to the movement of the Spirit it can easily lose its connection to life. When this happens some churches realize it and pursue the Spirit, desperate to catch up, to regain that connection to life. Others respond by establishing a great list of rules and practices in hopes that if they go back to doing things the way they were done when the Spirit was there, then life will return; then the Holy Spirit will come back to them.

The Spirit of God is not something we control. The living Spirit does not answer to us and is not a mechanized device to be programmed. The Spirit is a powerful force of transformation that moves in our lives and in the church. As He moves we are forced to choose between following or standing still. Churches that do the latter have a tendency of turning into the reanimated dead.<sup>3</sup>

Let me tell you about Mary. Mary was a very kind woman, thoughtful and considerate of others. She had grown up in the church and was developing her relationship with God. When she was around thirty, she moved with her husband to a new town in the “Bible Belt”—that part of the country where churches adorn every street corner. In talking with her one day, I learned that she would not go to church anymore. I asked her why. She proceeded to tell me that when she first moved to the area she was looking for a church to attend with her family. She walked into a church in town and she was wearing a skirt that went down a good bit past her knees and a plain T-shirt that was not tight or low-cut or anything. (Mary paused for a moment, a little choked up, then continued.) When she walked in, there was a crowd of people in the foyer. She hardly made it through the door when the pastor of the church walked up to her and said, “If you are going to dress like a whore, get out of my church!” That was it. So she left, and she never went back.

I was appalled. It’s bad enough when people in the church, who may be there for the wrong reasons, say something rude, but the *pastor*? A pastor should know better! Where many Christians and even church leaders today differ from Jesus is clear: Jesus offers love when He has every right to judge, while we offer judgment when we have little grounds for it.

**When a church stops behaving like Jesus, it stops offering the life it advertises.**

In John 8 the religious leaders bring a woman who was caught in adultery before Jesus and ask Him what to do with her. They dragged this woman out of the house and likely did not take the time to clothe her. It is probable that this woman was cast at Jesus’ feet naked, having been caught in sexual sin. Jesus’ response is not, “Look at how you are dressed, you whore, get out of my presence.” Jesus defends the woman. He offers her grace and tells her to go and sin no more. The point that I want to make is, when a church stops behaving like Jesus, it stops offering the life it advertises.

## Hypocrisy

I knew a girl who came to church every Sunday and acted like a saint, but when Friday night came around, she was drunk at a party or having sex with her boyfriend. She exuded passion about following Jesus, but it never left the church building. She had no apparent remorse. She even felt it was OK for her



to rebuke someone who was dancing too much at church. Do you see the contradiction? She attacked someone who was acting in a way she felt was inappropriate while she herself engaged in what was clearly sinful behavior. She was that girl with a plank in her eye trying to take a speck out of someone else's (Matt. 7:3).

**I have often found myself with a great plank in my eye and a smile on my face.**

This defines hypocrisy. She played the good-Christian card at church and then did her own thing the rest of the time. What makes this worse, however, is how we hear her story. The people who see hypocrisy in others are usually trying to ignore it in themselves. It is easy to condemn this girl for her hypocrisy, but in so doing, we also condemn ourselves. When we judge her, aren't we doing the same thing she did? I have often found myself with a great plank in my eye and a smile on my face because I saw so many specks in the eyes of others. We often criticize others for their faults while we ourselves have personal sins we have been unable to conquer. Of course, we must not condone sinful behavior, but we must remember that we ourselves are sinners, or we become modern-day Pharisees.

What scares me is that when I hear stories like this, I am almost encouraged. I am glad other people sin and act like hypocrites, because it makes me feel better about myself. That's a problem. Jesus would never rejoice in the sin of others. When Jesus corrected people's sins, He did so with patience and with love, which I notice is rarely the way I deal with them. When we stop following Jesus' example, we stop following Jesus. Rebuke without love is merely accusation, and God is not the accuser. When we rebuke others without love in our hearts, we are acting like Satan. I guess the thing that really scares me is that when I look at how the church often deals with sin, it doesn't resemble the way Jesus dealt with sin.

The church has a virus. That virus is running rampant through many of those who are a part of it. As the church begins to move further from Jesus in its behavior and treatment of others, it slowly pulls away from its source of life. This can only go on for so long before the infection takes over and the church becomes a Zombie church.

## Stagnancy

In a little town not too far from where I went to college was a church that had about thirty or forty people in regular attendance. They brought in a very passionate, young preacher. After he'd been there for about eight months, laying the groundwork and building relationships with the people, he started pushing for them to do something.

He wanted to see the church reach out to the community and to grow. The church leaders balked; they didn't like that the preacher was trying to grow the church. They fired him. No reason was given other than that they liked things the way they were and they didn't want someone changing them. They wanted a biblical message with the call to action surgically removed. Have you ever walked into a church like that? It is almost as if everyone glares at you for "intruding" into their perfect setting. There may have been life there once, but now it is gone.

If you can't imagine a church like this, let me help you. While in Bible college, I went to a church in Arkansas where my friend Eric was preaching. This church had nine members. It did not have nine members because it was a vibrant group of believers launching into a new region, hoping to set their town on fire with the love of God. No. It had once housed sleeping infants, restless toddlers and children, adults of every size and shape. It had once been a church with life and love and energy—until . . . The facts of the "until" I do not know. Perhaps the town's economy changed and people moved away. Perhaps the church itself changed, split, or atrophied. For whatever reason, the church had not prospered.

At the time of my visit, not one of the Nine Survivors was under the age of fifty-five. Several of them had been born and raised in this very church. And they intended to die there.

Every week between Sunday school and the worship service, they pulled on a rope which ran from the bell tower down into the foyer. This bell rang for an entire minute before service every week. Each gong was a loud invitation to all, but the gongs just echoed in empty streets. The piano was badly out of tune, the hymnals cracked and missing pages. They hired a Sunday-only preacher to bring a sermon and give an invitation. After a month of this, Eric asked them if he could come down on a Saturday and have a fellowship picnic with them at a park. They said no.

After a few weeks, Eric noticed that the baptismal was covered with a sheet of plywood that had been painted blue. “Why is the baptismal covered?” he asked.

The lady who played the piano answered, “A little boy fell in it a while back and got hurt.”

“Oh, I see. You didn’t want anyone to drown,” Eric said, assuming he understood.

Then, as if there was nothing wrong with the words she was about to say, the lady responded, “Oh there hasn’t been any water in this baptismal for years!”

After his first few months, Eric asked them if it would be OK if he didn’t do the invitation every week—because, well, no one new showed up.

The man who was basically in charge of the church told Eric, “I don’t know that I am comfortable coming to church without an invitation.” Eric wanted to ask, “An invitation to what? Everyone in this church has been a Christian for two or three times the amount of my life.”

One week, before the bell ringing, a young woman showed up. The room was divided into two rows of pews facing a big iron-clad pulpit at center stage. All of the regulars sat on the far end of the left side of the church. This new lady came in and sat down on the right. No one said hello. No one walked over to introduce themselves. During the greeting time, the nine faithful members all warmly embraced each other without so much as a smile or nod to their guest. In fact, throughout the service the members stared at her like she was a monster.

This lady could have been walking into a church for the first time in her life. When people go to a new church, they are usually looking for something. What if this woman had shown up that day because she was looking for Jesus? The best impression of Jesus she received is that Jesus is cold, impersonal, and only cares about His own. And that’s because, as you know, people see Jesus by looking at those who follow Him. So when the church fails to show the love and hospitality of Jesus, how can the world see it? Jesus tells us to go to the world, and yet sometimes God is gracious enough to bring the world to us. We cannot afford to miss opportunities like that.

This church was missing something. The doors were open; the services were held. But this church was dead. The Nine Survivors went to church because it is what they had done their entire lives. For them, church wasn’t about a relationship with Christ. Church was what you do on Sunday morning. We could learn from their faithfulness and dedication in staying with a church for so long, but this church was missing something no church should ever go without. This was the first time I realized I was in a Zombie church.

## Living Among the Dead

On the Sunday morning following Jesus’ crucifixion, Mary and a few other women went to Jesus’ tomb with spices they had prepared. This was a common burial practice that prevented the dead from . . . smelling like the dead. When they arrived at the tomb they found that the stone had been rolled away. They looked inside, but Jesus’ body was nowhere to be found. While they were there two angels appeared.

In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!

Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” (Luke 24:5–7)

The angels ask: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Sometimes our answer is: “Because that’s what you do on Sunday morning.” We seek life where life does not exist. Some churches look for Jesus in all the wrong places. They seek Him in the rules: don’t do this, don’t go there, don’t do that. They expect to find Him in the laws and traditions. They search for Him in routines and theological debates. They seek the living among the dead. They look to religion to offer the life that only comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Life will not be found in a denomination, in a practice,  
in a custom, in a rule, or in a building.**

When you look in the wrong places, you will not find what you seek. If the church is going to share in the resurrected life of Jesus, then it must start seeking Jesus and just Jesus. The church needs to stop trying to get the most answers right. Life will not be found in a denomination, in a practice, in a custom, in a rule, or in a building. Life is not granted to those who get the most answers right in this world. Life comes from the grace of God to all who will accept it. It is time for the church to stop looking for life in the wrong places and to start focusing everything they have on Jesus, for He is truly life.

## Restoring Life to the Undead Church

What is a Zombie church? A Zombie church is a church that goes through the motions. It may behave like a healthy, living church, but the Zombie church has lost its connection to life. The people have the name of Jesus. They sing praise to Him. But it has been a long time since they really lived their lives for Him. Zombie churches may do the right things, but they do them for the wrong reasons. Our “heart” is reflected not just in what we do but by the motivation and determination with which we do it. It is possible for us to look good by following all the proper religious protocol while holding on to wickedness and sin. It is even possible for us to do good things for bad reasons. As the saying goes, intent always precedes content.

Imagine two men making a toy: one of them is doing it to get paid; the other is making a gift for his daughter. While they may be carrying out the same task, there will be a distinct difference in the investment they make on this object. The man who is making this toy so he can get what he wants (his paycheck) will do it as well as required to earn his reward. The man making the toy for his daughter on the other hand will strive to make the toy to the best of his ability.

Why the difference? The first man’s motivation is practical. What he’s doing is simply a means to an end. He can do the right thing and make a nice toy, but he will do it only insofar as he sees the benefit in doing it. The second man is not motivated by self-preservation but by love. Thus, while the product may look the same, the heart behind it is not.

In reading through the Gospels, I’ve noticed how frustrating the Pharisees and Sadducees are to Jesus. In John 4 we see Jesus interacting with the Samaritan woman, a woman who has lived a sinful life. Jesus treats her with kindness and love despite the fact that she doesn’t seem to get who He is. Yet when He encounters the religious leaders who use their “connection to God” for personal gain and come to Jesus in efforts to trap Him, Jesus often rebukes them. Unlike man, Jesus looks to the condition of the heart. To those who come honestly seeking Him, Jesus is gentle and patient, even when they make mistakes. Peter’s life is an example of just how much patience Jesus has with those who honestly seek Him. Yet in Luke 11 we see Him criticizing the religious leaders again and again. Jesus knew their motives. While the disciples

wanted to learn, the religious leaders wanted to trap Him. In the church, we are not just supposed to do the right things; we need to do the right things for the right reasons.

One of the beautiful things about Jesus is that He doesn't demand perfection. We may get things wrong in our efforts to follow Him. We may hurt people who come looking for Jesus without ever knowing it. In His grace, God doesn't hold our sins against us. Jesus doesn't ask us to get it all right. He just asks us to honestly come to Him. We will never be perfect, but we can always look more like Jesus. It needs to be said: God is cool. No matter how many times we get it wrong, He is still right there to offer us life. Who else does that? Who else offers such perfect love and forgiveness to such undeserving people?

What the church needs above anything else is a genuine connection to the giver of life, the life the Holy Spirit brings to all who genuinely seek to dwell in the presence of God. Do we mold and shape God to be like us, to give us what we want, and to be on "our team"? Do we like the *idea* of a god, a god of our own fabrication, a god controlled by rules and traditions? When we read God's Word, do we read our own wants and desires into Scripture, molding it to fit with our lives, or do we mold our lives to fit with Scripture? Life comes when we stop trying to make Jesus like us and we start trying to make ourselves like Jesus, when we lay down our wants and desires and seek to conform everything we are and have to be like Him.