

Take Up Your Cross

Jesus called us to live as if we are already dead. Have you discovered the freedom of the crucified life?

✖ One of the primary marks of Christ's life was His continual declaration that He was born to die. He taught His disciples that the avenue to greatness was always found in the willingness to forfeit one's own desires and serve those who are the nearest and often the least in the world's eyes.

The call to partnership in His kingdom was initiated by an invitation to "deny [yourself], and take up [your] cross [an instrument of death], and follow Me" (Mark 8:34-35, NKJV). Such an offer is quite a bit different from the man-centered, need-oriented invitations that permeate the landscape of modern church culture today.

Could it be our world is looking for followers of Jesus who will live as He did— with a spirit of radical, joyous self-sacrifice and self-denial? Not people who are dead boring, but rather those who have died to self and sin—alive-to-God kind of people.

There is something infectious about those who have decided to live for more than themselves. The novelist Dorothy Sayers said of Jesus that He was crucified not because He was boring but rather because He was so dynamic that He was dangerous to the status quo of His day.

As those commissioned for the 21st century, we have an assignment to serve baby boomers, Gen-Xers and postmoderns, many of whom have grown up watching the greatest special effects in movie history and playing digital fantasy games that allow them to reside in a place of virtual reality. Yet

they know the difference between the fake and the real—and are turned off by the phony. Their cry is for authenticity.

The movie *End of the Spear*, which premiered in fall 2005, highlights the story of five radical missionaries who were all young men in the 1950s, a time in our nation's history when other young people were discarding the core values and restraints of their parents, choosing to have fun and enjoy their freedoms. What began as Happy Days-style innocence and fun eventually, through the spirit of the age, led to mind-altering drugs, free sex and massive rebellion for some youth in that era.

In the midst of this emerging Babylon, the five missionaries heard a call from God. They recognized that fulfilling it would be demanding, dangerous and life-consuming. That is how they knew it was from God! They were not motivated by a desire for fame or success, but by a consuming passion to empty out their lives for the cause of Christ.

The call was to take the gospel to the most remote tribesmen of South America, the Auca Indians of Ecuador.

Jim Elliot was one of the five who accepted it. Aware that the Aucas were isolated and had never seen a white man, he knew the risks involved.

But in obedience, Elliot and his fellow frontiersmen made the journey to the place of their assignment. Though fully aware of the danger that awaited them, they went boldly where others had never been.

Sadly, their first attempt to meet with the Aucas face to face led to their deaths. Warriors ambushed the missionaries and killed them with spears. When the story hit the media back in the United States, people were shocked that such a thing could happen in modern times to those who were trying to bring a message of hope and forgiveness.

Several months after Elliot's funeral, a friend of the family cautiously approached his widow, Elisabeth. There was a question burning in his heart, but he could hardly give voice to it. How could he ask what he was thinking? Yet, he wanted to know.

"There is something I don't understand. ... How do you deal with the fact that Jim was killed that day in the jungle?" he asked. "How do you deal with the way he died? How do you handle that?"

The young widow looked him in the eye and with little hesitation, replied: "My Jim didn't die in the jungle that day." At first the friend thought Elisabeth was in denial about her husband's death.

"No," she continued, "Jim did not die in the jungle. My Jim died one night in high school, while he knelt by his bed in prayer. He had told the Lord, 'Jesus, if You did all this for me, there is nothing I can do for You that will ever repay the debt I owe. I commit myself here and now to go wherever You want me to go and do whatever You want me to do. I'm Yours; do with me as You please.'"

She paused, looked at their friend and said, "That's where my Jim died!"

What will change cities and churches? What does it take to impact a nation? What will cause businessmen and businesswomen to leave a legacy that marks a town or country? What is it that will reshape the spiritual landscape of a generation that has overdosed on "things"?

It will not be our Christian music, no matter how good it is, nor our regurgitated conference circuits. I question if it will be our satellite TV programs, which much of the world refuses to watch. So then, what will it take?

Though Christian music, conferences and TV all have their

place, none of them is a sufficient catalyst for changing the world. Something far greater is required. It will take Christians who are living, as Jim Elliot did, as if they are already dead.

The Bible tells us we are no longer our own because we have been bought with a price (see 1 Cor. 6:20). We need to hear the voice of the Lord challenging us today with the words of the apostle Paul: "I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central" (Gal. 2:20, The Message).

Are you ready to lay down your life, take up your cross and follow Christ? Are you ready to join the ranks of the company of uncommon people whose life is lived so dynamically that they are dangerous? Remember, dead men have no rights to argue about and no reputations to defend. Be bold ... live as if you have already died!

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