

INTRODUCTION

Ah-h-h! The hot tub. What could be better? At that moment, the Breen family's health club membership fee seemed well worth it. My wife, Sally, and our three children—Rebecca, Elizabeth, and Sam—enjoyed all the typical instruments of torture, like weights and treadmills. But the hot tub was the place for me while we lived in Sheffield, England.

I was relaxing in the hot tub one week when my daughters came up to me and asked if I had tried the Sun Shower yet.

"I don't even know what a Sun Shower is," I admitted. "What is it?" Did I even want to know?

They pointed. "It's that white tube over by the pool. You stand up in it and get a tan, but you also get totally refreshed. It's like standing on the beach in South Carolina."

Now, as far as the Breen family is concerned, the beaches of South Carolina are the closest things to perfection that you can find here on earth. With my daughters' exuberant assurance that I couldn't possibly regret it, I agreed to give it a try.

"What does it take?" I asked.

"A pound for three minutes."

So I rummaged for a one-pound coin and walked over to the Sun Shower. The door opened to a room the size of a small closet. Nothing looked too dangerous, so I stepped in and closed the door. Still not certain of what I was doing, I made sure to read the instructions posted on the wall

clear through. Following them carefully, I put on a pair of goggles hanging in there and shut my eyes tightly. Nothing happened.

Of course. The one-pound coin.

I opened my eyes, took off the goggles, put the coin in the slot, pulled the goggles back on, and waited. Nothing. Well, I heard a slight whirring sound and a few clicks, but I felt nothing. This in no way resembled the beach in South Carolina.

When the three minutes were up, the whirring stopped and I stepped out.

“What did you think?” my daughters asked.

They looked so excited. Clearly they thought the Sun Shower was a fantastic idea. How could I possibly let them down? But I had to be honest.

“Well,” I said, “I guess I just don’t get it. I mean, it was okay, but probably something you girls would like better.”

Elizabeth and Rebecca were profoundly disappointed. They had wanted so badly for me to share their experience, and I hadn’t. Frankly, I thought the whole thing was rather strange, but I didn’t say much about it.

The next week we were back at the health club. Rebecca and Elizabeth came up to me with renewed fervor.

“Dad,” they said, “this time try it for six minutes. Maybe three minutes wasn’t enough for you to start feeling the effects. Give it six minutes, okay?”

I started to tell them how silly the whole thing was, but they were giving me those looks. You know the ones. No father could say “No.”

So back I went to the white tube. I stepped inside the room, pulled the door closed, read the instructions, put on the goggles and squeezed my eyes shut. Nothing.

Oh, right. The coins. Goggles off, coins in, goggles on. I closed my eyes again and waited. Six minutes is a long time to wait when you’re standing

in an enclosed booth with your eyes shut, listening to whirring and clicking noises. When it was over, I took off the goggles and hung them back on the hook and left.

Elizabeth and Rebecca were anxiously waiting for me. “How was it this time, Dad? Did you feel the effects this time?”

I looked at my daughters’ expectant faces. “I don’t really think it’s for me.”

They thought I was completely daft.

“This is something for you and your friends to enjoy,” I said. “Maybe I’m just too old to get the full benefits of it.”

One thing I must say for my children: they don’t give up easily. The next week they were ready.

“Dad, try it this time for nine minutes. You’ll really love it if you give it enough time. Nine minutes should do it for you. C’mon, Dad!”

I looked over at Sally for support, but she just gave me the “You got yourself into this, get yourself out” look. So off I went for the third time to the Sun Shower. I went in the tube, pulled the door shut, and read the instructions clear through for the third time. They hadn’t changed a word. I put on the goggles and closed my eyes.

Sigh. The coins.

Goggles off, coins in, goggles on, eyes closed. Let me tell you, if six minutes is a long time, then nine minutes is a very long time to stand in a closet in the dark listening to clicks and whirrs. So I took a chance and opened my eyes—only to find that I could see right through the goggles. Looking around, I wondered if I would get more of a tan if I stood closer to the mirror.

Then I saw some things that looked like coat hooks on the wall. M-m-m. I thought that maybe they were there to reflect the rays. Standing still for

nine minutes was not much more interesting than keeping my eyes closed for nine minutes, so I turned around.

I saw a doorknob. What was this? I turned the knob, and the door opened to a room filled with the most refreshing light rays and replicated ocean breeze I could ever imagine.

For three weeks I had been standing in the changing room.

All this time I thought I was having the experience I was supposed to have. I had tried to work up feelings of refreshment, but I knew that they weren't real. As hard as I tried, I just didn't get it! Finally I had experienced the real thing.

Is your experience with Jesus like this? Have you been standing in the changing room for weeks and months, even years, wondering what's so great about being a Christian? You see others at church or in your small group, and they talk about how wonderful it is to know Jesus—really know him like you know your best friend—and you long for that same experience. Maybe you even try to put on a good show, telling your friends how much Jesus means to you even though it's not true. Perhaps you attend church every week but come away feeling empty, thinking it's a great waste of time. Yet others come out refreshed, so you keep going back, keep putting your money in the coin slot and keep telling your friends what an exhilarating feeling you have too. But you know it isn't working for you.

Jesus would not have invited us to be his friends if he didn't mean it. He would not have called us to follow him if we were not meant to see where he is going. This is what we're inviting you to do: walk with Jesus. It sounds simple, doesn't it? It is simple, but it's not easy. We can help you develop a deeper understanding of what it means to walk with Jesus—to be his follower, his disciple—in a way that you can remember and apply to every situation and relationship in your life.

INTRODUCTION

So what are you waiting for? Come on—open the door. Leave the closet of spiritual emptiness and step into the light of a passionate life!

IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

We work all day, we feed the kids, we clean the bathroom, we go to church; we work all day again, we feed the kids again, we go to choir practice, we catch the news; we go to the store, we do the laundry, and we feed the kids again. You get the picture. Before we know it, years have gone by and we wonder what has become of our lives.

Have we done what we thought we would do by this time?

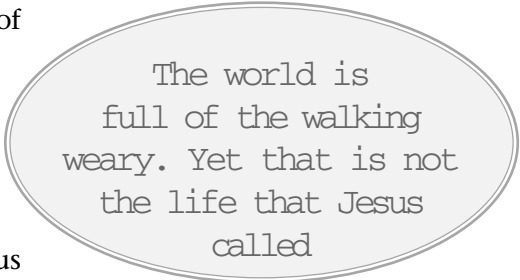
Have we become who we thought we would become by this time?

Have we sat at the feet of Jesus as much as we wanted to?

It's not difficult to let responsibilities and roles shape our lives. You're a mom or a dad. You're a teacher or a carpenter or a stockbroker. You're a single parent. You're caring for an aging parent. You're working two jobs to pay off medical bills. You're on three ministry teams at church and now have been asked to join the board as well.

And you're human, so you get tired of all this! Soon even things that you care about deeply wear you out and you want a break.

The world is full of the walking weary. Yet that is not the life that Jesus



The world is
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called

called us to live. In Matthew 11:28-29, Jesus says “Come to me, all you who are weary . . . Take my yoke . . . and learn from me. . . .”

Jesus wants to show us a better way to live. When we follow where he leads, amazing things happen. How much richer and satisfying our lives are when we let Jesus shape them.

BEING, NOT DOING

In any city in America we can choose from dozens, if not hundreds, of churches that preach the message of Jesus and his kingdom. In those churches we can join small groups, cell groups, life groups, and home groups. Even without leaving our homes, we can watch Christian television programs or listen to preachers on the radio exhorting and encouraging us. We do our chores or exercise to worship music on our chewing gum-sized MP3 players.

And then there are books. Thousands of them. Every year thousands of newly published Christian books join the tens of thousands already on the shelves. These books tell us how to be a Christian student, a Christian teacher, a Christian parent, a Christian journalist, a Christian spouse. Books tell us how to pray, how to sing, how to think, how to speak as Christians. Some books even claim to tell us what God wants us to drive.

Enough already.

This is not one of those books.

This is not a book about *doing* discipleship.

This is a book about *being* disciples. This is a book that helps us see Jesus. This is a book that helps us see where Jesus is going. This is a book that helps us follow Jesus where he leads us.

JESUS THE RADICAL

Jesus was a radical. He did not fit into the prefabricated mold of Messiah that the Jewish culture had prepared. He did not offer his backing to the established religious community. He showed no interest in influencing the politics of the day. Jesus was a radical from the time he was 12 and dared to go about his Father's business by questioning and instructing the rabbis in the temple (Luke 2:46-49).

In his revolutionary style, Jesus spoke of a kingdom where God ruled as king. Jesus broke into history at a real point in time, died on a real cross, and left behind a real empty tomb. This was no last-ditch effort on God's part to save the world from its woes. This was his plan for bringing his kingdom to earth. The cross and resurrection changed history; now we are pointed toward heaven.

Now here is the amazing part: we can live in this kingdom right now! The kingdom of God is not some far-off, distant, future realm. It is not a state of mind. It is not something we dream about or long for. We are in it! God's kingdom is a real place where we can walk and work and have relationships.

Here is yet another amazing thing about Jesus' announcement of this kingdom. The King wants to live with us!

God is not an absent ruler sending messages through his servants because he can't be bothered to come himself. The Ruler of the kingdom has come to us. He lives in our neighborhood. He invites us to walk with him, to work alongside him, to sit at the supper table with him. And, if we accept his invitation, he says we can live with him forever in his kingdom—starting today.

Living in the kingdom with the king as our guide—that is discipleship. That is what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We have no higher calling.

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The essence of being a disciple is spending time with the Master himself. Walking and working and eating with Jesus is not about rules and regulations. It's not about how

many times a month you go to

church, or how many verses you read in

your Bible every day, or how much of your income you give to the church.

God wants us to do all those things, just for different reasons than the Pharisees had. He wants our hearts.

WHICH WAY WILL YOU GO?

Following Jesus is not a part-time occupation. It requires total commitment. It requires fighting against the tide of what's popular. Jesus will not be cheated—he wants everything you have.

In the aftermath of the tsunami that devastated Asia in December 2004, incredible stories of survival have emerged. Many people recount being so quickly submersed in water churning with debris that they didn't know if their struggling was taking them up towards the surface or only farther down into the depths. The survivors were those who were able to find their way up.

When you're struggling against the tide, it's important to know which way is up. We're living in a time of seismic changes in our culture—changes that have left us disoriented in our spiritual journey even as we fight against the tide. But Jesus knows the way. Jesus is our unfailing compass.

We invite you to walk with us in a passionate, intimate life as a follower of Jesus in the kingdom of God. We will show you how to do this in a practical, daily way. No magical formulas or ten-step programs are involved. As a matter of fact, you can find everything we're going to share with you in your own Bible. We are going to look at what Jesus did in teaching his followers two thousand years ago, then suggest ways to do the same things today.