

Chapter 14

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Imagine you are a basketball player playing in the biggest game of the season. This game could be a fierce rivalry, a game to determine the conference champion, or a huge playoff game. In our imaginary season you have not played much all year but now you are in the game during crunch time due to foul problems and injuries of the starters. Now imagine seconds remaining, down by two, and your team has the ball. Your go to players are covered, your open, and a cross-court pass is zipped to you. You fire up your three point shot at the buzzer and you watch your shot hit nothing but net! Your teammates swarm all over you and the fans are going wild in the stands! Now imagine how you feel. Would you have an unbelievable sense of exhilaration? If so, why? Maybe you have experienced a moment like this. Perhaps you have scored the winning touchdown, basket, goal, run, or point or maybe you are like so many of us who only dream of this moment.

Have you ever really thought why this moment is something to desire? Could it be for one brief moment in your life you knew, without a shadow of a doubt, your life made a difference? You knew others counted on you and you came through. You knew you made your teammates, coaches, family, and fans happy and doing this makes you feel great. It's a feeling you could spend much of your life wanting to duplicate.

If winning a game makes you feel good because you knew you made a difference how much greater do you think you might feel if you made a difference in matters far more important than a game? To make a difference you don't have to change the entire world all by yourself. Your life can have tremendous value from just making a difference in one person's life and in turn you may inspire that person to make a difference in the lives of many.

This was premise of a heartwarming movie called "Pay it Forward". Trevor, the main character, was a seventh grader who for a social studies assignment came up with the idea that challenged individuals to make a difference in the lives of others. His idea was, instead of paying back a life impacting good deed from someone else, an act that made a difference in your life, you do a life impacting good deed to three others that have done nothing for you. In other words you "pay forward" a good deed. Trevor didn't think his idea was working but the end of the movie made it obvious his idea had been impacting lives across the country. This is not a new idea. Jesus has been calling us to "pay it forward" for the last two thousand years and to more than just three people, we are challenged to make a difference, to be a light (Matt. 5:14,16), to all those we have an influence with.

Changing one life, and having that life effect other lives should be what makes the Church the most dynamic and powerful institution known to mankind! Instead church often becomes just a "social club" or a "bless me" organization. We need to get involved in a church and instead of worrying about or focusing on having this church meet our needs, and of course there are always many needs a local church can meet for its members so this function should not be ignored, we should focus on becoming equipped to make a difference in our community. This topic, the mission of the Church, will be the subject for much of this chapter. This mission can only be fulfilled if we have a deep down inside commitment to make a difference ourselves.

Being a positive influence takes on many forms. As stated before in this book simply being kind to someone or encouraging someone can make more of a difference than you may realize. I hope after reading what you have read you now understand what can make the biggest impact on

the life of someone. I hope by now you see that out of all the things you can do for someone, helping them to have a better (or first time) spiritual relationship with God is what will make the most beneficial difference in their lives. What I hope you have that's even better than an understanding is a desire to make a difference. When you begin to have a desire to make a positive difference in the life of others you then begin to take the offensive in the spiritual war that rages all around us.

Trying to make a spiritual difference in one person's life takes far more courage than getting involved with the many causes students, and many others, typically get involved with. Everyone wants to feel like they have a life of value, the problem is we can misdirect our efforts of making a difference. We can easily get involved in "crusades" for a cause while not understanding the facts or all the implications concerning the issues involved. In other words, in reality we may not be doing any good at all or even causing harm to others (i.e. demonstrating for a ban of logging that will put people out of work, increase the costs of homes, and that may even be harmful for a forest in the long-run). Getting involved with these type of causes are often impersonal and carry little risk of personal rejection, especially rejection from your peers. In fact, getting involved may be a form of trying to find personal acceptance from others because of a common cause.

Trying to help someone by leading them to a spiritual relationship with God carries a great risk of rejection, and rejection from those you may care about deeply, while doing something that in no way would harm anyone. Because of pride and selfishness people do not want to give up or change what they are doing, even if what they are doing is harmful to them in the long-run. You would only be trying to show someone how to have the fulfilling life God wants for us, a life free from the bondage of sin and free from worry because of knowing God's truths. Once they begin to know God they will want to, instead of feeling compelled to, give up anything they know will hinder their spiritual relationship.

Again I will state your spiritual growth will be what creates your desire to make a difference. There is a huge difference between feeling a desire and feeling an obligation. God doesn't want people to serve Him and others out of an obligation. He wants your heart and if you give that to Him you will want to serve others out of your love for God. The previous chapter (Love – The End Result) went into great detail discussing how God's love should impact our lives and the lives of those we influence. From reading that chapter you should know your love of God is what will give you the power to be effective in helping others and what will give you the most personal satisfaction from your efforts.

You should understand you might not see the effects of your influence until years in the future if at all. Your role may be as a seed planter while others do the harvest. I admit this can be frustrating because human nature as it is we like to see the rewards of our efforts. I struggle with this frustration at times because I sometimes wonder if my efforts to make a difference are really doing any good. This is when we really need to totally trust God and just know He is working in our lives as well as the lives we care about.

There is even the possibility our efforts may not achieve the results we want, even if we put all our heart and soul into our efforts! Our responsibility is to share God's truths and it's the hearer's responsibility to accept or reject those truths. Understanding this simple concept has helped me immensely because too often I have felt like a failure when sharing with someone I care about and it seemed like my efforts were being wasted (although "seeds" may have been planted). As I stated in the preceding paragraph, if you care about someone and if you do not see any fruit from your efforts to help that person, you will more than likely experience frustration and even

emotional pain. But you can take comfort in knowing you are carrying out God's will by being faithful in your attempt to make a difference.

A great example of someone who devoted his life to serving God, and could have so easily given up because he rarely saw any fruit from his efforts was the prophet Jeremiah, who is the author of the Book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament. As the word defines success (success = results and prosperity and/or recognition), Jeremiah would be considered a complete failure. He was poor and often experienced severe hardships and humiliation. He was thrown into prison (chapter 38), taken to Egypt against his will (chapter 43).

Jeremiah is the master of knowing what rejection feels like. He was rejected by his neighbors (11:19-21), his family (12:6), and religious leaders (20:1,2; 28:1-17), friends (20:10), his audience (26:8), and the kings (36:23). For 40 years he fulfilled his calling and carried out his prophecies. For 40 years the vast majority ignored his message of – repent and turn to God or you will suffer consequences. Jeremiah stood alone in his calling and experienced great heartbreak for the people and country he loved. He wept over their fate as God had Jeremiah deliver prophecies predicting their doom, including the destruction of Jerusalem (chapter 39) and the horrible events that followed (40-45).

Yet, according to what really matters, Jeremiah has to be one of the most admired and successful men in history because of his faithfulness to God. To sum up why we should use Jeremiah as an example to follow I am going to quote directly from a brief biography of Jeremiah written in the introduction of the Book of Jeremiah from the Life Application Bible, Published by Tyndale House Publishers.

Endurance is not a common quality. Many people lack the long-term commitment, caring, and willingness that are vital to sticking with a task against all odds. But Jeremiah was a prophet who endured.

Jeremiah's call by God teaches how intimately God knows us (and how he can use us – my words). He valued us before anyone knew we would exist. He cared for us while we were in our mother's womb. He planned our lives while our bodies were still being formed. He values us more highly than we value ourselves.

Jeremiah had to depend on God's love as he developed endurance. His audiences were usually antagonistic or apathetic to his messages. He was ignored; his life was often threatened. He saw both the excitement of a spiritual awakening and the sorrow of a national return to idolatry. With the exception of the good King Josiah, Jeremiah watched king after king ignore his warnings and lead the people away from God. He saw fellow prophets murdered. He himself was persecuted. Finally, he watched Judah's (his country) defeat at the hands of the Babylonians.

Jeremiah responded to all this with God's message and human tears. He felt firsthand God's love for his people and the people's rejection of that love. But even when he was angry with God and tempted to give up, Jeremiah knew he had to keep going. God had called him to endure. He expressed intense feelings, but he also saw beyond the feelings to the God who was soon to execute justice, but who would afterward administer mercy.

It may be easy for us to identify with Jeremiah's frustrations and discouragement, but we need to realize that this prophet's life is an encouragement to faithfulness.

So we need to understand God wants to use us, but the way he may want to use us may require a great deal of patience, trust, and even disappointment and heartbreak because in spite of anyone's efforts, there will be those that will still reject God at worse or not act on his truths. We

need to write the following scripture on our heart because I know from experience there will be times when these words will really help.

Gal. 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Along with perseverance we need to be careful we have the right motives for making a difference. Are we seeking personal recognition for being a great or good person for helping others or are we helping only because we care about that person? If you are seeking recognition then you may be helping someone for your benefit instead of an unselfish desire to help someone else. If your heart is right you will have a deep down inside satisfaction about what you are doing even if no one else appreciates or knows about your efforts.

If you are starting to feel that you really do want to make a difference but your not sure how just ask God for His help. If you trust him with all your heart you will be amazed at what He will do with you. God equips us to help others by giving us spiritual gifts and to be most effective we need to make use of these spiritual gifts. 1st Corinthians, chapter 12, describes the various spiritual gifts and these gifts include gifts of faith, wisdom, teaching, administration, and even having miraculous powers.

This chapter in Corinthians also points out just as the body needs different parts to function as a whole, with even unglamorous parts being essential, the spiritual body needs people for different purposes. Not all purposes will seem very glamorous but none-the-less they will be very important. A basketball team can't win with all post players or all point guards. A football team can't win with all running backs or all linemen. Could a team win with no bench or no one to push the starters in practice? They couldn't and yet the value of the bench is so often overlooked and under-appreciated.

Think of a fisherman, especially since our efforts at leading others to God can be compared to fishing. This fisherman is the one that gets all the glory for his or her catch but where would he or she be without those who make the boat, the pole, or provide the bait. Achieving any task requires far more "behind the scenes efforts" than what meets the eye, and these efforts are essential to complete the task at hand. Little things you do for others may not seem like much but they can make the difference between that person "winning or losing" in life, because they are part of a greater plan for that person's life. We each have strengths in certain areas and we need to take advantage of those strengths. If you put your trust in God he will put those strengths to good use.

Judges 6:14-16 The Lord said "Go with the strength you have and I'll be with you always." (paraphrased)

At the same time trust God to help you overcome your weaknesses in order to improve your "game". For example, if a great three point shooter who is not a great ball handler can learn to do a little better job driving to the basket the opposition will have to guard not as closely which can open up the three point shot more. Using myself as an example, my hope is to be able to make a positive difference in the lives of many students I see because I sincerely care for them. I enjoy writing and have a much easier time communicating in writing what I want to say to these students. I love trying to encourage these students but I often have a very hard time saying what I want to when I see them in person because I am basically an introverted person.

This weakness used to really bother me (I confess it still does at times) but I am accepting the fact oral communication is not my true strength. I am trusting God will help me take advantage of my strengths and at the same time help me overcome my weaknesses because verbal

communication is important in order to develop relationships and to take advantage of limited opportunities. I feel if I can verbally communicate well enough to at least get the attention of those who I have the opportunity to help, at least convey that I do care about them, then I may have a basis to use my strengths in the future such as e-mails, letters, and other written communication, and this will also help the effectiveness of written communication.

One of our biggest challenges will be to get ourselves out of our comfort zone. Who likes to make a fool of themselves or embarrass themselves? This can happen when we try to take on new challenges. I can't tell you the number of times I made stupid comments in my attempts to encourage some of the student athletes I know, especially when I first began to have a desire to help these athletes. Too bad we can't go back in time and watch any famous athlete when they first tried to learn their game. I'll bet there were times they looked pretty foolish or at least not very good but their love of the game kept them going and helped them overcome their weaknesses.

An example of someone's passion for what they were doing helping them persevere through a not so successful beginning was Michael Jordan. He was once cut from a high school basketball team. His determination and love for what he was doing eventually led to him being one of the greatest basketball players ever. I would be willing to bet being comfortable was the last thing on the mind of anyone who ever really wanted to achieve anything. It will be our love for God that will get us past our embarrassments, discomfort, and failures.

If you sincerely want to make a difference but are unsure how then I urge you to ask God in prayer to show you how you can be most effective. Talk to you pastor or seek out classes offered by churches. Our church conducts a class that helps its members do a personal assessment of their spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences (SHAPE). If you would like a copy of the book used to administer this class then check out the reference section of this book. I am going to basically copy a page from this book that lists spiritual gifts with a few modifications of my own because it will give you a good idea how God can use us. These potential uses are:

Administration (1 Corinthians 14:40): The ability to organize and manage people, resources, and time for effective ministry.

Craftsmanship (Exodus 31:3-11): The ability to creatively design and/or construct items to be used for the ministry.

Creative Communication (Psalms 150): The ability to communicate God's truth through music and a variety of art forms (our church often performs skits to get a message across).

Encouragement (Acts 14:22): The ability to motivate God's people to apply and act on biblical principles, especially when they are discouraged or wavering in their faith. The ability to bring out the best in others and challenge them to develop their potential.

Evangelism (Acts 8:26-40): The ability to communicate the message of Jesus to unbelievers in a positive, non-threatening way. The ability to sense opportunities to share Christ and lead people to respond with faith.

Faith (Romans 4:18-21): The ability to trust God for what cannot be seen and to act on God's promises, regardless of what the circumstances indicate. The willingness to risk failure in pursuit of a God given vision, expecting God to handle the obstacles.

Helps (Acts 6:1-7 & 1 Corinthians 12:28): The ability to recognize unmet needs in the ministry and take initiative to provide practical assistance cheerfully and without need for recognition (our church meets in a school so an unglamorous but very valuable help is set up and tear down before and after the services).

Hospitality (! Peter 4:9,10): The ability to make others, especially strangers, feel warmly welcomed, accepted, and comfortable, leading to a more receptive atmosphere when sharing your faith.

Intercession (Colossians 1:9-12): The ability to pray for the needs of others over extended periods of time on a regular basis. The ability to persist in prayer and not be discouraged while waiting for the answer.

Knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8): The ability to discern biblical truths.

Leadership (Hebrews 13:7-17): The ability to clarify and communicate the purpose and direction of a ministry in a way that attracts others to be involved. The ability to motivate others by example

Mercy (Romans 12:8): The ability to manifest practical, compassionate cheerful love toward those that are suffering or hurting, even if their suffering was caused by their own choices.

Teaching (1 Corinthians 12:28): The ability to help a particular group understand God's truths and help them apply those truths to their lives.

Giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-7): The ability to generously contribute material resources and/or money beyond the 10% tithe so that the body may grow and be strengthened. The ability to earn and manage money so it may be given to support the ministry of others.

Many of these talents are for use within the church or body of believers and this is what is referred to as a "ministry". Our ministry is important because taking care of the needs of believers is important, but eventually ministries should be part of a support function that equips us for our mission. The purpose of a "mission" is to teach, share, or proclaim the benefits of a relationship with God and the good news about Jesus. Everyone we meet is a potential ministry or mission so these gifts can apply to whatever we do. For example, coaches can use the gifts of teaching, leadership, and encouragement.

I am going to give the last gift listed, giving, a little more attention because many who read this are or will attend college just for the purpose of making money. Hopefully you now understand making a lot of money does not make you a better person, especially in God's eyes. But God can bless you financially so you can make a difference in the lives of others with your wealth. Tithing is when you typically give 10% of your earnings to your local church. God challenges us to tithe and in early church times the church was the welfare system for widows, orphans, the disabled, and the poor. Today it is rare to find a church where all it's members tithe 10% but let's see what could happen if everyone simply gave 10% of their earnings to the church.

As an example we will use a small church with 100 families who attend regularly. Let's say the average earnings of each family is \$40,000, a reasonable figure with most families having two wage earners. This would result in an annual income of \$400,000 (100 x 40,000 x 10%) each year. A church that size could easily operate with a \$150,000 to \$200,000 budget (hey – my degree is in accounting so I had to do some number crunching in this book). This means that church could have between \$250,000 and \$200,000 to take care of its own and this could include using 10% to fund missions or community programs. If that church made a commitment to take care of it's members, no one would have to buy life insurance, worry about losing a job, or experience a financial crises because of health problems. In practice things don't work out this way.

Maybe it's like the chicken and egg problem, does the church fail to take care of it's members in need because the members don't tithe, or do the members fail to tithe because the church doesn't take care of it's members in need? I tend to think the problem is the first option. You may be thinking you wish you had something to donate 10% of but if you are a student that

day will come before you know it. Adapt your lifestyle so you can freely use the financial blessings God gives you to help others know God instead of putting yourself in a financial bind from over spending on indulgences like so many do. Be a giver instead of a taker and just see how much more you will enjoy life when you know your life makes a difference.

As you should now see, there are so many ways you can make a difference and making a difference is so very needed in this world. There are many people hurting because life has become very tough – relationship problems, job problems, school problems, addiction problems, and shattered dreams. There are also many searching for more in life because deep down inside there is a feeling there is something missing. Then there are those who have been fooled into thinking it is pleasure, wealth, and fame that will make them happy and they think life is not too bad right now because they are getting what they want. How will these people handle tough times when they do come, and believe me, there will be tough times. Even if tough times do not come they will eventually realize they are “chasing after the wind” just as Solomon did. There are lonely people, depressed people, and people who struggle every day to find just a little happiness. There are so many that need or will need caring people to make their lives better.

Making a positive difference in the lives of others has been the major theme of a church I attend. With this in mind I am going to summarize in my own words the message of a sermon given by the Pastor of Hoffman Town West, Todd Cook. I chose this sermon because the message fits perfectly with the message of this chapter and this book. The sermon is aimed at our local church body and addresses what the purpose of our local church should be. If you consider yourself a believer of Jesus, long-time or first-time, you belong to His church which consists of all believers according to scripture (1 Cor.12:13 – For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body..). You need to become a member of a local church if you are not already in order to more effectively carry out the purpose God has given us for our lives.

Church: What’s the Purpose?

What would the world be like if we never existed. Would the world be better off or worse off or does it matter at all? Hopefully we are like George Bailey, the character Jimmy Stewart played in the classic movie “It’s a Wonderful Life”. He thought his life had no real value, yet when he was given the opportunity to see what the world was like if he had not existed he saw how the world would have been a much lesser place. His life made a difference more than he ever realized.

This should be our story as well because the world should be a better place due to our lives. We all will leave a legacy in this world, all our lives have an impact on other lives, one way or the other and not all lives are positive influences. People who do have a positive impact typically have goals for their lives, visions, dreams they want to fulfill. As a collective group of believers we should also have a vision, a purpose, a dream. Hoffman Town West has a slogan, a mini mission statement that all churches would do well to live by. That slogan is –

We exist to know Christ and make Christ known

This statement is what the church should be all about. Because of our involvement in church we should become stronger spiritually, we should become knowledgeable about the Bible and God’s truths. In other words, we learn to know Christ and the more we know him and God’s truths the better our lives become because of how we are changed. Once we experience how Jesus can change our lives, once we develop the love of others that our love of God should produce, we

should have a desire to share Christ with anyone we can because we know what a difference knowing him can make. If we do this, this is how we turn our churches into dynamic, powerful forces in our community.

A large church isn't necessarily a dynamic church (quality is what counts with God, not quantity) and a small church can be very dynamic. What makes any church dynamic, a church that makes a difference, is having a church with members that have had their lives totally changed because of Jesus. Maybe your faith is so new you have not experienced or recognized God's involvement in your life. If this is the case there is tremendous value in attending a dynamic church where God has made a difference in the lives of others who attend, where God has been made very real to them. This is when you see all that you have been learning in this book is not some sort of fairytale, you see first hand there is power in having a strong spiritual relationship with God because you will get to know individuals where God's involvement has been become obvious, where it has made a difference in their lives.

There is a danger though, of becoming involved in church once we have experienced God's impact or because of our conviction to attend church. We can get too comfortable, we can focus on doing church work and what we end up doing is not doing what the work of the church should be! This is important to understand because this is what typically happens in so many houses of worship. We get so busy doing church things that we can start patting ourselves on the back for our works or attendance for so many church functions that we never have time to do what we should really be doing. We get so busy we totally forget about or don't have time for the second part of our mini mission statement – make Christ known. Yet, making Christ known should be our ultimate purpose because Jesus makes this purpose clear in the following scripture.

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

So many churches have abandoned or ignored this calling because its members have never matured beyond the "baby stage" of their faith. Maybe a reason why members never mature is that they never make any real attempt to grow because of selfishness, and let's face it, we all struggle with being selfish. For many they just want their ticket into heaven and they want all the benefits God can provide without making any commitment to God. Lives will not change in this type of church because members are mainly concerned about their own comfort and they really do not want to risk anything for anyone else.

An exit survey taken across the nation to determine why people go to church illustrates our misunderstanding of the purpose of the Church. In this survey it was discovered that 85% of church people surveyed thought the church existed to meet their needs and their families needs. This is not the view that will change the world or at the very least impact our community as it should be impacted. Sure, church should help make us better people, but if we are not maturing past the level where we only care about ourselves then we have to question if our faith is really doing anything for us at all. Have we died to self to live for Christ, does the love of God and others really mean anything to us, a love that should be the fruit of our growth? Have we really grown spiritually?

This is an age-old problem because of our selfishness and failure to understand what church should be about. Jesus recognized this with the religious leaders of his day. The established religion of the day had become a "social club" for those that thought they had the market cornered on righteousness. It seems like they thought this was some sort of exclusive religious club, and are

any of our churches still like this today as we read in the following scripture where these religious leaders hearts were?

Luke 15:1,2 Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him (Jesus). But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

And did this attitude ever upset Jesus! Does our lack of concern for those that don't know God, even those who are very far from knowing God because of how they lead their lives matter? It mattered to Jesus because in the book of Luke, Chapter 15, Jesus tells three stories in a row, the only time something like this happens, to make it very clear how upset he was over this attitude and to make us understand what is really important to God. Jesus wanted to make certain the religious leaders understood what really mattered by repeating the same message three times with different stories so there would be no excuse for missing the objective of his very important message.

The first story is about a lost sheep (versus 3-7), the second story is about a lost coin (versus 8-10), and the third story is about a lost son (versus 11-32). In all these stories the obvious point was that something of great value to them was missing and that an all out search to find what was missing was warranted. Even though the shepherd had 99 other sheep the one that was missing was important to him. In case the religious leaders didn't get the point Jesus tells them there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner found than 99 righteous people that do not need to repent.

Then Jesus goes on to tell us about the woman who loses a coin and after making an all out search and finding it she calls her friends and neighbors to celebrate her finding this lost coin. Again Jesus tells the point of the story – there is rejoicing with the angels of God over one lost sinner who repents. Neither the shepherd nor the woman were content with keeping only what they had, their focus was what was missing because what was missing was important to them.

The last story, the story about the lost son (the story of the prodigal son), should have made it clear how important we all are in God's eyes if the religious leaders didn't "get it" after the first two. In this story a father's son leaves his father's household for the lure of the world. After discovering where he was going was not so great, and coming to a realizing how good he had it, he decided to return (he "repented" of his lifestyle) to his father. Again a celebration follows after the return of a "lost soul". Jesus clearly points out what matters most to God is our salvation, the only event that would be a cause for a celebration in heaven.

And to make it clear how we can miss the point of our lives, in this story Jesus tells of the brother of this lost son who could care less about his brother's return, in fact he was angry because he didn't like the fuss made over his returning brother. He was just like the religious leaders who were not happy because Jesus spent his time trying to "heal the sick" instead of joining their self-righteous religious club.

Could Jesus make it any clearer how important it is to reach the lost? Could it be any more obvious how great a purpose our life would have, how much we would please God, if we did what we could to help a lost world know God? Can you understand why the Church can be so dynamic if the focus of the Church was to equip us and train us to make a difference instead of just providing a nice place to socialize for people who only want to be "good Christians".

I know many of you who are reading this book are just getting started in life and at this point may be in the infant or learning stage of your faith. So all I am asking of you is to consider where your faith should take you as you mature. I urge you to get involved in a church if you are

not already. No church is perfect, and some are less perfect than others, but all churches need people who have a sincere love of God and who have a desire to grow spiritually. While we have our time on earth there are basically two things we can do now that we can't do in heaven. We can sin or we can tell people what a difference Jesus can make, so be part of the solution instead of the problem and help make your place of worship the dynamic life impacting force it is meant to be.

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for reading this book! My hope is that it has made a difference in your life, and that this difference has inspired you to impact other lives. I am going to close this book by recapping what I pray you now understand about your purpose in life, what I hope you see what Christianity should be all about, how your life should be changed and how this change will influence other lives.

There is so much I hope you now understand that maybe you have not understood before. And there is much to understand! I have become much wiser from writing this even though I have called myself a Christian for over 20 years. If you only grasp one new truth I hope you grasp how much God loves you, how his love is behind our being created, and how having a relationship with him fulfills our purpose in life. If you understand this you will want to know God, you will want to love him back, you will want to obey and serve out of your love for him, and you will want more from life than just living for possessions, status, and the other meaningless things we typically live for.

I hope you have a deeper understanding of why Jesus is the only way and what makes Christianity different from all other religions. I hope you have no doubts about the reliability of the bible because of the evidence presented. In fact the evidence is evidence in itself! I have a hard time believing so many individuals would put so much effort into writing the huge amount of books that illuminate Christianity, the volumes and volumes of Bible commentaries, if there was not strong evidence in the first place to trust God's word. Maybe this is why no other religion has the amount of universities, the countless highly educated professors and authors that teach and write about the faith. There is not the foundation for their faith that God has provided for Christians with his word, and certainly not the very strong evidence such as fulfilled prophecies, scientific and other supportable evidence that proves the bible is no ordinary book written by man.

I hope you have a better understanding of what stands in the way of having a life impacting relationship with God. Pride, lack of trust, forming our identity on things that mean nothing to God, disobedience can all be overcome through spiritual growth.

I hope you understand what it takes to grow and mature spiritually. In addition I hope you see there are spiritual forces that are trying to keep us from knowing God. These forces would love for us to think truth can't be known, or there is no absolute truth so it is ok to do whatever you want to do, and of course this explains why so many despise Christianity and Christians (and Christ but those that hate him would rarely admit to this) and any concept of moral truth.

I hope you see how you should hate the world, the lies and deceptions about what life should be about along with the tremendous selfishness and evil in the world, yet we should love the life God has given us no matter what we are going through. When we do this others will see something very different in us and they will want what we have. Our love of God should give us a desire to share the answer to everything – and the answer is faith in Jesus Christ. And I sincerely hope you understand what it really means to “win”, what really matters in life, and what is important to God because that is the only thing that matters. If you do you will have a joy that goes beyond all understanding, you will truly have life to the full.

I will end this book with words from a great song that tells us what the world really needs and we will become equipped through our spiritual growth to give the world this very precious gift.

PEOPLE NEED THE LORD

**Every day they pass me by
I can see it in their eyes
Empty people filled with care
Headed who knows where
On they go through private pain
Living fear to fear
Laughter hides their silent cries
Only Jesus hears**

**We are called to take His light
To a world where wrong seems right
What could be to great a cost for
Sharing life with one who's lost
Through His love our hearts can feel
All the grief they bear
They must hear the words of life
Only w e can share**

CHORUS

**People need the Lord
People need the Lord
At the end of broken dreams
He's the open door
People need the Lord
People need the Lord
When will we realize
People need the Lord**

Lyrics from Steve Green album and title song – “People Need the Lord”.