

A Radical Shift

IN MOBILIZATION

Robby Butler

This past May, a condensation of Dr. David Platt's Radical sermon series was published as *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream*¹. Its dramatic reception may herald a tipping point in North American mission mobilization (370,000 copies in 18 printings in the last five months), as widespread dissatisfaction with seeker-sensitive "Christianity Lite" converges with the passion of 100,000 *Perspectives* alumni and *Mission Frontiers* recipients for discipling all nations. Hundreds of churches have bought copies of *Radical* for their members, and dozens of Christian high schools have ordered the book for their graduating seniors.

Never in history has such a clear call to sacrificial involvement in blessing all nations (see excerpt on page 14) become so swiftly popular. *Radical* is rapidly joining *Operation World*² (which *Radical* promotes³) as a favorite gift from missionaries to their supporters⁴.

Radical's Limitations

Those eager to share Platt's message with their friends and leaders will find the free video and audio presentations available on iTunes⁵ even more effective, and should note the limitations inherent in reducing this sermon series to print and extracting it from the community that knows the author's heart:

- Apart from the warmth and humility of Platt's verbal presentation, readers prone or sensitive to guilt or legalism may more readily overlook Platt's cautions about these dangers. Similarly, those prone to self-righteousness or self-condemnation may be more susceptible to these in reading *Radical* than in listening to the sermons.
- Lacking supportive community to live out the Scriptural truths in *Radical*, isolated individuals may be overcome with hopelessness about breaking free of cultural pressures against living fully for Christ, or they may rush into fleshly efforts or extremes that miss the Holy Spirit's empowering or leading.

- Without an understanding of the foundational importance of long-term efforts to establish effective discipling movements among all peoples, Platt's attractive accounts and promotion of short-term experiences does little to remedy widespread ignorance of the damage which uninformed short-term trips often do in long-term fields.



- Those so inclined may readily dismiss the book on superficial grounds that miss the heart of Platt's message: "What is radical about reading through the Bible in a year?" Some might say, "Is Platt really so naive as to think the simple redistribution of wealth will solve the problem of poverty?"
- Misguided application of the truths in *Radical* can also lead individuals and even churches into:
 - ~ neglecting to learn from the collected insights of past mission efforts (through *Perspectives*, etc.),
 - ~ treating the symptoms of poverty without addressing their underlying spiritual and social roots,
 - ~ caring solely for individuals while neglecting to fight societal systems and patterns of oppression,
 - ~ deciding what the poor need without asking them and engaging them in the solution,

- ~ bypassing long-term workers who will have a clearer view of how to address local needs,
- ~ assuming that most human suffering would be alleviated if we simply gave more,
- ~ giving unwisely in ways that undermine local initiative while fueling division and dependency, and
- ~ imposing a syncretized Christianity which requires rejection of cultural identity to follow Christ.

In response to the concern that *Radical* will leave some feeling they can never live radically enough, Platt responds:

The last thing I want to do is to leave people living with low-level guilt, constantly wondering, "When am I going to be radical enough? What do I need to do, how do I need to give, or where do I need to go in order to do enough for God?" These are obviously unhealthy questions, for the gospel teaches us that Christ alone is able to do enough. He alone has been faithful enough, generous enough, compassionate enough, etc. The gospel beckons our sin-sick souls to simple trust in Christ, the only One who is truly radical enough. In Him, we no longer live from a position of guilt, but from a position of righteousness. . . .

The last thing I want to be a part of (or worse yet be promoting) is a stream of Christianity that thrives on guilt over gospel, prioritizes our work more than God's grace, or burns out evangelicals in unsustainable efforts to do more, give more, or sacrifice more. . . . My goal has simply been to call people to believe the gospel—the gospel that not only saves us from our sins, but also compels us to lay down our lives gladly for our own good and ultimately for God's glory in a world of urgent spiritual and physical need.⁶

Readers with concerns about Platt's message, or who want to dig deeper, are encouraged to listen to or read the transcripts of the original *Radical* sermon series.⁷

Radical's Great Strengths

Despite the inherent limitations of reducing Platt's insights into a book for circulation outside the Brook Hills community, its strengths far outweigh the limitations listed above:

- The humble and gracious way Dr. Platt invites others to share his struggle with realities we would rather ignore.
- The practical steps offered for individuals and churches to get started in *The Radical Experiment*.
- The challenge *Radical* presents to spend according to our needs, rather than our means, and to apply the surplus to discipling the nations and caring for the poor.

- The correction *Radical* provides for common American assumptions that:
 - ~ the affluence which sometimes accompanies faith is for our enjoyment rather than our stewardship,
 - ~ God isn't serious about judging sinners, especially rich Christians who close their hearts to the poor,
 - ~ Jesus wants us living safe, comfortable lives rather than following Him in serving the lost and the poor in ways that may be costly and risky from the world's perspective,
 - ~ saving faith can be present without the evidence of growing maturity and obedience,
 - ~ we can embrace God's promises while excusing ourselves from His commands,
 - ~ producing a Sunday morning show to draw crowds and building facilities is equivalent to making disciples,
 - ~ we can simultaneously live for both present blessings and future treasure, and
 - ~ the equality of people in God's sight translates into an equality of ideas.

Radical is not the last word in God's work to stir Christ's bride to disciple all nations and prepare ourselves for His return⁸. However it represents an important and exciting step in the right direction for the Western Church. 🌐

Footnotes

¹ Multnomah Books, 2010.

² Gabriel Resources 21st Century Edition; Revised 2005 (2010 edition by Biblica Publishing due out 10/15).

³ "Operation World . . . has revolutionized my prayer life more than any book outside the Bible." *Radical*, p. 189. For a quantity discount see p.16t

⁴ For a quantity discount see p.16

⁵ For free Brook Hills sermons (video or audio), visit BrookHills.org/media and select a podcast (on right).

⁶ Platt's response (invited) to Kevin DeYoung's 5/25/10 review of *Radical*, at tgcreviews.com/reviews/radical-taking-back-your-faith-from-the-american-dream.

⁷ For free Brook Hills sermons (video or audio), visit BrookHills.org/media and select a podcast link (on right). This series is 9/6/08–10/25/08. For a free transcript of the *Radical* sermons contact Ann Coe acoe@brookhills.org.

⁸ See also the new (9/1/10) book by Floyd McClung of YWAM: *Follow: A Simple and Profound Call to Live Like Jesus*, David C. Cook, 2010. *Radical* is a corrective which points toward a solution, while *Follow* goes further in describing the solution. For individual MF reader discounts on 3-24 copies of *Follow*, call David C. Cook at 800-323-7543, x3, x4 and mention "use code" MFFLLW.