

Radical:

TAKING BACK YOUR FAITH FROM THE AMERICAN DREAM

"THE GREAT WHY OF GOD"

David Platt

This is an excerpt from pages 68 to 75 of the book *Radical* by David Platt

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes."¹

What a statement! God goes so far as to say that when He acts among His people, He doesn't show His grace, mercy, and justice for their sake but for the sake of His own holy name among the nations.

The global purpose of God evident in the history, writings, and prophets of the Old Testament carries over into the New Testament. In the Gospels we see how Jesus ended His time on earth by commanding His followers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.² The letters are filled with the same emphasis as Paul, Peter, James and John led the church through persecution and suffering to spread the glory of God to the nations.

In light of all we have seen, it is no surprise to get to the last book of the Bible and see the culmination of God's purpose. Imagine this scene described by John:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."³

In the beginning of earthly history, God's purpose was to bless His people so that all peoples would glorify Him for His salvation. Now, at the end, God's purpose is fulfilled. Individuals from every

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nation, tribe, people, and language are bowing down around the throne of God and singing praises to the One who has blessed them with salvation. This is the final, ultimate, all-consuming, glorious, guaranteed, overwhelmingly global purpose of God in Scripture. It is the great why of God.

God blesses His people with extravagant grace so they might extend His extravagant glory to all peoples on the earth. This basic, fundamental truth permeates Scripture from beginning to end. Yet I wonder if we unknowingly ignore the great why of God.

Jesus Didn't Die for Just You

We live in a church culture that has a dangerous tendency to disconnect the grace of God from the glory of God. Our hearts resonate with the idea of enjoying God's grace. We bask in sermons, conferences, and books that exalt a grace centering on us. And while the wonder of grace is worthy of our attention, if that grace is disconnected from its purpose, the sad result is a self-centered Christianity that bypasses the heart of God.

If you were to ask the average Christian sitting in a worship service on Sunday morning to summarize the message of Christianity, you would most likely hear something along the lines of "The message of Christianity is that God loves me." Or someone might say, "The message of Christianity is that God loves me enough to send His Son, Jesus, to die for me."

As wonderful as this sentiment sounds, is it biblical? Isn't it incomplete, based on what we have seen in the Bible? "God loves me" is not the essence of biblical Christianity. Because if "God loves me" is the message of Christianity, then who is the object of Christianity?

God loves *me*.

Me.

Christianity's object is *me*.

Therefore, when I look for a church, I look for the music that best fits *me* and the programs that best cater to *me* and *my* family. When I make plans for *my* life and career, it is about what works best for *me* and

my family. When I consider the house I will live in, the car I will drive, the clothes I will wear, the way I will live, I will choose according to what is best for *me*. This is the version of Christianity that largely prevails in our culture.

But it is not biblical Christianity.

The message of biblical Christianity is not “God loves me, period,” as if we were the object of our own faith. The message of biblical Christianity is “God loves me so that I might make Him—His ways, His salvation, His glory, and His greatness—known among all nations.” Now God is the object of our faith, and Christianity centers around Him. We are not the end of the gospel; God is. God centers on Himself, even in our salvation. Remember His words in Ezekiel: He saves us, not for our sake, but for the sake of His holy name. We have received salvation so that His name will be proclaimed in all nations. God loves us for His sake in the world.

This may come as a shock to us. You mean that God has an ulterior motive in blessing us? We are not the end of His grace? And the answer Scripture gives is clear. Indeed, we are not at the center of His universe. God is at the center of His universe, and everything He does ultimately revolves around Him. If this is true, we may wonder, then does this make God selfish? How can God’s purpose be to exalt Himself? This is a good question, and it causes us to pause until we ask the follow-up question: Whom else would we have him exalt? At the very moment God exalted someone or something else, He would no longer be the great God worthy of all glory in all the universe, which He is.

We must guard against misunderstanding here. The Bible is not saying that God does not love us deeply. On the contrary, we have seen in Scripture a God of unusual, surprising, intimate passion for His people. But that passion does not ultimately center on His people. It centers on His greatness, His goodness and His glory being made known globally among all peoples. And to disconnect God’s blessing from God’s global purpose is to spiral downward into an unbiblical, self-saturated Christianity that misses the point of God’s grace.

It’s a foundational truth: God creates, blesses, and saves each of us for a radically global purpose. But if we are not careful, we will be tempted to make exceptions. We will be tempted to adopt spiritual smoke screens and embrace national comforts that excuse us from the global plan of Christ. And in the process we will find ourselves settling for lesser plans that the culture around us—and even the church around us—deems more admirable, more manageable, and more comfortable.

“I’m Not Called”

I wonder if we have in some ways intentionally and in other ways unknowingly erected lines of defense against the global purpose God has for our lives. It’s not uncommon to hear Christians say, “Well, not everyone is called to foreign missions,” or more specifically, “I am not called to foreign missions.” When we say this, we are usually referring to foreign missions as an optional program in the church for a faithful few who apparently are called to that. In this mind-set, missions is a compartmentalized program of the church, and select folks are good at missions and passionate about missions. Meanwhile, the rest of us are willing to watch the missions slide shows when the missionaries come home, but in the end God has just not called most of us to do this missions thing.

But where in the Bible is missions ever identified as an optional program in the church? We have just seen that we were all created by God, saved from our sins, and blessed by God to make His glory known in all the world. Indeed, Jesus himself has not merely called us to go to all nations; He has created us and commanded us to go to all nations. We have taken this command, though, and reduced it to a calling—something that only a few people receive.

I find it interesting that we don’t do this with other words from Jesus. We take Jesus’ command in Matthew 28 to make disciples of all nations, and we say, “That means other people.” But we look at Jesus’ command in Matthew 11:28, “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,” and we say, “Now, that means me.” We take Jesus’ promise in Acts 1:8 that the Spirit will lead us to the ends of the earth, and we say, “That means some people.” But we take Jesus’ promise in John 10:10 that we will have abundant life, and we say, “That means me.”

In the process we have unnecessarily (and unbiblically) drawn a line of distinction, assigning the obligations of Christianity to a few while keeping the privileges of Christianity for us all. In this way we choose to send off other people to carry out the global purpose of Christianity while the rest of us sit back because we’re “just not called to that.”

Now, we know that each of us has different gifts, different skills, different passions and different callings from God. God has gifted you and me in different ways. This was undoubtedly the case with the disciples. Peter and Paul had different callings. James and John had different callings. However, each follower of Christ in the New Testament, regardless of his or her calling, was intended to take up the mantle of proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth. That’s the reason why He gave each of them His Spirit and

why He gave them all the same plan: make disciples of all nations.

Isn't it the same today? When I sit down for lunch with Steve, a businessman in our faith family, it's obvious we have different callings in our lives. He's an accountant; I'm a pastor. He is gifted with numbers; I can't stand numbers. But we both understand that God has called us and gifted us for a global purpose. So Steve is constantly asking, "How can I lead my life, my family, and my accounting firm for God's glory in Birmingham and around the world?" He is leading co-workers to Christ; he is mobilizing accountants to serve the poor; and his life is personally impacting individuals and churches in Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe with the gospel.

Steve and others like him have decided that they are not going to take the command of Christ to make disciples of all nations and label it a calling for a few. They are not going to sit on the sidelines while a supposed special class of Christians accomplishes the global purpose of God. They are convinced that God has created them to make His glory known in all nations, and they are committing their lives to accomplishing that purpose.

In Romans 1:14–15, Paul talks about being a debtor to the nations. He literally says, "I am in debt to Jews and Gentiles." The language is profound. Paul is saying that he owes a debt to every lost person on the face of the planet. Because he is owned by Christ, he owes Christ to the world.

Every saved person this side of heaven owes the gospel to every lost person this side of hell. We owe Christ to the world—to the least person and to the greatest person, to the richest person and to the poorest person, to the best person and to the worst person. We are in debt to the nations. Encompassed with this debt, though, in our contemporary approach to missions, we have subtly taken ourselves out from under the weight of a lost and dying world, wrung our hands in pious concern, and said, "I'm sorry. I'm just not called to that."

The result is tragic. A majority of individuals supposedly saved from eternal damnation by the gospel are now sitting back and making excuses for not sharing that gospel with the rest of the world.

But what if we don't need to sit back and wait for a call to foreign missions? What if the very reason we have breath is because we have been saved for a global mission? And what if anything less than passionate involvement in global mission is actually selling God short by frustrating the very purpose for which He created us? 🌐

End Notes

¹ Ezekiel 36:22-23

² Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:8

³ Rev. 7:9-10

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