

JESUS NATION

Belonging to and Becoming Part of
the Greatest Nation Ever

Joe Stowell



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Jesus Nation: Belonging to and Becoming Part of the Greatest Nation Ever

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With deep appreciation to God for the
wonderful gift of grandchildren, this book is
dedicated to the next wave of Jesus Nationals
who have been born into our family:

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But most importantly, I am grateful to Jesus, who has given me something significant to write about. May he be pleased to bless this effort to his glory and the advance of his nation.

INTRODUCTION

Thy Kingdom Come

IF YOU EVER WANTED TO BE an answer to someone's prayer—Jesus' prayer, in particular—this is your chance. Your chance to come to grips with the fact that, as a Christian, you belong to a nation of global and eternal proportions. A nation whose culture and habits are revolutionarily different. A nation that will ultimately prevail over all other nations and offer its inhabitants eternal peace and limitless joy in a new heaven and earth, where there will be “no more death or sorrow or crying or pain” . . . or any of the other twisted and broken stuff that troubles us in this world (Revelation 21:4, NLT). It's a nation that calls all of us who belong to it to live here and now, in our earthside nations, by the radically different habits of the Jesus Nation, so that all can see and experience a preview of the really big show to come. A nation that Jesus prayed for when he prayed, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, KJV).



A new wave is sweeping the church in the West. Its momentum is driven by a new generation of Jesus followers who are bent on bringing the transforming power of Jesus to a world that is torn by hate, famine, hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression, and war. It calls for the mobilization of men and women to see themselves as agents of global influence. Not just pastors, missionaries, and ministry professionals, but everyone. It's a call to leave our pews and use our talents, treasures, and energies to bring the healing and helping energy of the love of Jesus to people in need both locally and globally.

The motivation is borne out of a fresh awareness of our responsibility to act like people of the Kingdom of God—the Jesus Nation—by bringing the helping hand of Jesus to right wrongs, settle injustices, and feed the poor. This new breed of missionary is committed to bringing clear and clean water to parched and polluted sources; aiding the AIDS crisis by coming to the rescue of children and women who by no choice of their own have been infected; educating the less fortunate and the marginalized; teaching the poor to farm, to fish, and to sustain themselves

and their families in other ways; fighting against the evils of the sex-slave trade; and helping to rebuild economies that have been devastated by greed and oppression. And all of this in the name of Jesus.

I can't think of a better way for followers of Jesus to spend their time and talents than to serve the needy and broken as he did. And, in a world that increasingly sees us as troublemakers, bigoted and arrogant in our claims to have the corner on righteousness, truth, and the exclusive claims of Jesus, how better to catch their attention than to show them that this world is a better place because followers of Jesus have mobilized to lend a helping hand?

So, I'm a raving fan of taking the love of Jesus anywhere and everywhere. It's what Jesus Nationals do.

But, if we are not careful, in all the fanfare about our awakened concern for bringing the Jesus Nation to this world, we may miss the eternal and personal ramifications of its agenda in our rush to meet the immediacy of human need.

With his encounter with the woman at the well, Jesus modeled for us the point that human spiritual needs trump human material needs. As he said, he came "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). It's not that it's not important to meet material and physical needs in ways that untwist tangled lives in a sin-twisted world. It's just that the eternal destiny of mankind cannot be ignored in the process. We can give them clean water, but as Jesus said, they will thirst again (see John 4:4-26). What people ultimately need is the inner spring of living water that only he can give.

My other concern is that in all of our *doing*, it may be easy to forget the importance of what we are *becoming*. What good is it to transport the light of our good works into a needy world through lives that, at the end of the day, are no different from the lives of any other earth-bound citizen? Or, worse yet, through lives that contradict the claims of Jesus? Living out the national agenda has massive personal ramifications—ramifications that revolutionize how we live. It calls us to become delightfully and refreshingly different. It makes us right-side-up people in an upside-down world. It refocuses our passions and desires from ourselves and pins them squarely on Jesus, our Eternal King and Superhero.

In the end, this book is about our bringing credibility to the message of Jesus by living lives that are just as compelling as our deeds.

Part 1

BEWILDERED



UNDERSTANDING OUR DILEMMA



Chapter 1

THE WAY

IT WAS TO PEOPLE with our kind of hurried-up, messed-up lives that nation-builder Jesus made an incredible statement. He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). To my way of thinking, he is either a huckster hawking snake oil, or he is onto something.

I say Jesus is onto something! To everyone he encountered, whether rich and successful like Matthew and Luke, whether busy in the routine of life like fishermen eking out an existence at the mercy of the sea, or whether barren and broken by life like a woman at a well, he offered them all something new, something better . . . he offered them *the way*. And when they embraced his solutions, he delivered on the promise of life in a better way. Which makes me think that it’s not life that’s the problem . . . the problem is that we have not yet found *the way*. That we have not yet embraced his way.

Here is what I find intriguing. Followers of Jesus in the first century were called a lot of things. They were called traitors to Caesar and the empire. They were known as insurrectionists and troublemakers. But to those who knew them best they were known as people of “the Way.” Acts 9:2 tells us that the great persecutor, Saul, was hunting down followers of Jesus so that if he found any of “the Way” he could bring them, bound, to Jerusalem. Interestingly, these were people who knew Jesus best, some who knew him personally, and they had found something in Jesus that had given them new hope, new direction, new purpose, and new joy. They had found in Jesus a whole new “way” to live. And it wasn’t

a passing fancy. They had found something not only worth living for, but worth dying for as well.

Jesus had shown them the way, and they weren't going back!

When we think of Jesus saying that he is the Way, we normally think that is the way to heaven—and he is, for which we are all deeply grateful. But he meant more than that. He meant that he is the way to live. The way to do money, to deal with friends and enemies, to manage our careers, to do family. He meant that he is the way to think, to dream, to desire, to do everything. That his ways are *how we do life*, not just what we do in life. That his ways are just as important as the outcomes . . . in fact, that his ways determine the outcomes. As someone has well said, if you have a WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) bracelet, you should also have a HWJD (How Would Jesus Do it) bracelet, as well. In short, he is the way to become all that he intends us to become.

This is really great news for all of us who feel that there has to be more to our Christianity than we are experiencing. Thousands upon thousands of us have been willing to take the name of Jesus and revel in his grace but have no clue about the adventurous and sometimes radical joy of becoming a person of the Way.

If all you have is the meek, mild Jesus who offers little more than an escape from reality into some ethereal comfort zone that only lasts until you are finished with your devotions, it's no wonder you have yet to find him as a compelling solution to life. You won't know Jesus as he is intended to be known, and life as it is intended to be lived, until you embrace the revolutionary Jesus and the revolutionary realities of the Way. If you are more interested in gaining than in giving; if ideas like "turn the other cheek" seem weak and vulnerable; if losing to win and dying to live seem like propositions for failure; if words like *surrender* and *submission* seem like cowards' words to you; if you fail to see meaning in suffering; if you feel that evil people should get what they deserve, that homeless people should just get a grip, that America is your nation and is totally in the dumps because it is not the "Christian" nation that you thought it should be . . . If this is what your Christianity looks like, then you may have Jesus, but it's clear that he doesn't have you. No wonder you sometimes feel that Jesus hasn't made much of an impact—you're not much different from the average guy who couldn't care less about him.

Instead, let me welcome you to a special journey that fills the moments

of your day with a sense of significance and lights your way forward to life on purpose, with a purpose. Let me welcome you to think and live differently. To stop being ordinary and average. To join me and countless others who are learning that life in the “ordinary lane” is not only unnecessary but wasteful, that there is a better way to spend our fleeting years here on this planet.

NOTES

Chapter 2: Something's Wrong

1. Peter Kreeft, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Heaven but Never Dreamed of Asking* (Fort Collins, CO: Ignatius Press, 1990), 20.

Chapter 8: Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?

1. Douglas Coupland, *Life After God* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1995), 359.

Chapter 9: Life on Purpose

1. John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Making the Best of It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.

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1. Eugene Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 16–17.
2. Ibid., I.
3. Eric Sandras, *Buck-Naked Faith* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 12–13.

Chapter 12: Excellence in Living

1. Alan M. Stibbs, “The First Epistle General of Peter,” *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, gen. ed. R. V. G. Tasher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 104.
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Chapter 16: Jesus Our Champion

1. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, revised, authoritative edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 93.
2. I am indebted to Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan for his insightful treatment of Jesus as Champion and for the supporting references to *The Lord of the Rings*.

Chapter 21: Marvelous Grace

1. This idea is found in C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1967), 138–139; and in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, revised (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 94–95.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR. JOSEPH M. STOWELL serves as the eleventh president of Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Comprised of approximately 2,500 undergraduate and graduate students, Cornerstone is a Christ-centered university with a passion for global influence through the transforming power of the gospel. The university is committed to creating an environment where students thrive both spiritually and intellectually as they prepare themselves to influence our world as followers of Jesus.

An internationally recognized conference speaker, Joe has also written several other books, including *The Trouble with Jesus*, *Simply Jesus and You*, *The Upside of Down*, and *Eternity*. Joe also serves with RBC Ministries, partnering in media productions, writing, and outreach to pastors. His “Strength for the Journey” Web ministry, www.getmorestrength.org, features daily devotionals, weekly messages and commentary, downloadable Bible study curriculum, and an audio library of his most-requested messages.

Joe serves on the boards of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and of Wheaton College and has a distinguished career in higher education and church leadership. He served as the president of Moody Bible Institute from 1987 to 2005 and as teaching pastor at the 10,000-member Harvest Bible Chapel in suburban Chicago from 2005 to early 2008, prior to assuming the presidency at Cornerstone University. He is a graduate of Cedarville University and of Dallas Theological Seminary and was honored with a doctorate of divinity degree from The Master’s College in 1987. Joe and his wife, Martie, are the parents of three adult children and the grandparents of ten grandchildren.