

JESUS,
I WANT
TO BE
FANATICALLY

DEVOTED
TO YOU.

ISN'T IT TIME TO FALL MORE IN LOVE WITH JESUS?

ARRON CHAMBERS

“In a world of one-calorie Christianity and diet discipleship, Arron Chambers issues a clarion call for ‘Devotees,’ disciples utterly devoted to Jesus. Without this dazzling gem of a book, I never would have properly understood my vocation as devotion.”

LEONARD SWEET

Bestselling author, professor (Drew University, George Fox University),
and chief contributor to sermons.com

“What a romp! I have rarely enjoyed reading a book as much as I did this one. It was filled with great stories, joyous delight, and powerful meaning. Mary Poppins was right—a spoonful of sugar does help the medicine go down. And what is that medicine? Become a fully devoted follower of Jesus.”

BILL HULL

Author of *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, *The Disciple-Making Church*,
Christlike, and *The Complete Book of Discipleship*

“The mantra of the Christian life is often articulated more like, ‘Do More, Be Better, Work Harder’ than it is, ‘Be Still, Listen, and Follow.’ In a world where the faith Jesus invites us into is often twisted into a works- and guilt-driven religion, *Devoted* guides us back toward finding rest in the ways of Jesus.”

CHUCK BOMAR

Pastor of Colossae Church in Portland, OR, and author of *Losing Your Religion* and *Better Off Without Jesus*

“Arron’s engaging, easygoing style and biblical viewpoint in *Devoted* show me that loving Jesus is not about checking off a religious to-do list. It begins with exploring the depth of His love for me. *Devoted* is a practical, down-to-earth unveiling of the beauty and simplicity of the gospel.”

RON BLOCK

Banjoist/guitarist/songwriter/vocalist with Alison Krauss and
Union Station

“Arron Chambers has done it again. His writings always teach me truth, hold my attention, and challenge me to become more intentional about my relationship with Jesus Christ. Arron Chambers loves Jesus, and Arron helps me to know and love Jesus more.”

DAVE STONE

Pastor of Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, KY

“What I love most about Arron Chambers is his raw transparency and honesty about what it means to follow Jesus. That’s why *Devoted* isn’t a step-by-step plan to discipleship, but a devotee’s journal of the journey to loving Jesus. *Devoted* is a great starting place for any new (or growing) Jesus follower.”

GEOFF SURRATT

Pastor and author of *Ten Stupid Things that Keep Churches from Growing*

DEVOTED

ISN'T IT TIME TO FALL MORE
IN LOVE WITH JESUS?

ARRON CHAMBERS

NAVPRESS 

*A NavPress resource published in alliance
with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.*



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

For more information, visit www.NavPress.com.

Copyright © 2014 by Arron Chambers. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

NAV PRESS and the NAV PRESS logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Cover design by Nicole Grimes

Cover illustration by Dean H. Renninger

Published in association with The Blythe Daniel Agency, Inc., P.O. Box 64197, Colorado Springs, CO 80962.

Unless otherwise identified, all Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked niv are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® NIV.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. Scripture quotations marked kjv are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version.

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are true to life and are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Devoted : isn't it time to fall more in love with Jesus? / by Arron Chambers.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-61291-637-8

1. God (Christianity)—Worship and love. 2. Jesus Christ. 3. Spirituality—Christianity.

I. Title.

BV4817.C35 2014

248.4—dc23

2014019165

Printed in the United States of America

20 19 18 17 16 15 14
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS



	A Word Before	<i>ix</i>
INTRODUCTION:	Just Love	<i>xi</i>
CHAPTER 1	Waiting: True Love Waits	1
CHAPTER 2	Trusting: Of Dependency and Dynamite	19
CHAPTER 3	Seeing: Love at First Sight	35
CHAPTER 4	Speaking: To Tell the Truth	51
CHAPTER 5	Learning: “A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste”	71
CHAPTER 6	Sharing: On Pound Cake–Filled Purses	85
CHAPTER 7	Remembering: The Descanso at Mile Marker 38	101
CHAPTER 8	Praying: “I Pledge Allegiance”	117
CHAPTER 9	Believing: Leap!	135
CHAPTER 10	Sacrificing: “Or, Buy Myself a Car!”	149
CHAPTER 11	Enjoying: Waist-Deep in Unexpected Joy	163
CHAPTER 12	Praising: Six Nickels and Three Dimes’ Worth of Worship	181
CHAPTER 13	Growing: The Magic Pill	195
	The 40-Day Devoted Experience	211
	Acknowledgments	237
	About the Author	241
	Notes	243

A WORD BEFORE



BEFORE YOU READ any further, I need you to know that you have two options right now.

First option: You can ignore what I'm saying here and jump right into this book. That's perfectly fine, although I do want you to know as you get started that I wrote study questions for individual or group study to go with each chapter; those are available as a free download on www.DevotedBook.com. The questions are designed to help you experience this book in a more lasting and relevant way. That being said, I hope you'll consider the second option.

Second option: Turn to "The 40-Day Devoted Experience" in the back of this book and allow it to guide you into a deeper relationship with Jesus. I wrote this book with the hope that it will help you fall more in love with Jesus. Falling in love can't be forced. Love must come to us on its own terms and in its own time—that's how healthy relationships work. And it's because I want you to have a healthy relationship with Jesus that I created "The 40-Day Devoted Experience."

DEVOTED

I explain the reasoning behind “The 40-Day Devoted Experience” in greater detail in chapter 1, so I won’t get into much more here, except to say . . . you are beginning a relationship with Jesus. Don’t rush it. Let his love come to you, embrace you, and take you deeper. The guide in the back of the book is not a program to be followed but an encounter to be experienced. I hope you’ll choose this option and spend the next forty days falling more in love with Jesus.

INTRODUCTION: JUST LOVE



THIS IS NOT the book I set out to write.

I had a plan for a book on discipleship for new Christians—and for those Christians who wanted a deeper faith—that included “Ten Simple Steps for Becoming a Better Disciple,” but the more I tried to digest what it really means to be a disciple of Jesus, the more I couldn’t stomach the idea that being a follower of Jesus is about following a “simple” plan.

A plan isn’t what drives me to work at the church building each day.

A plan isn’t what holds me as I hold the hand of a mother and father who have just lost a young child.

A plan isn’t what carried me along on the flood of grief after the death of my father.

A plan isn’t what brings tears to my eyes as I sing of my love for God.

A plan isn’t what drops me to my knees at the side of my kids’ beds each night.

DEVOTED

A plan isn't what sends me into the highways and hedges with an invitation from the King for the eternal banquet.

A plan isn't what moves me to move with Jesus, following him wherever he leads.

No, I didn't want to write a book that presented a plan for becoming a disciple of Jesus. I wanted to write a book that infused people with a passion to want a deeper relationship with him.

At Journey Christian Church we have a team of passionate people with whom I work to plan upcoming sermon series. Recently, in a meeting of our leadership team, we were wracking our brains, trying to figure out how to secure more ministry volunteers for our rapidly growing church. We have more open ministry slots than we have ministry volunteers, so we started planning a special Sunday to generate more volunteers and fill those slots. One member of my team suggested we use "Just Do Something" as the theme for the recruitment Sunday. Initially that sounded like a great idea to all of us, but the more we tried to flesh out that idea, the more frustrated I became.

"Wait a second," I said to my team, trying to verbalize what was stirring in my heart. "I think we're missing the point."

I turned to one of the women on my staff. "Tammy, how would you feel if Terry acted like spending time with you was a job?"

"I wouldn't like that very much," she said.

"Of course not," I replied, "because you want Terry to

want to spend time with you. You want Terry to spend time with you because he loves you. You don't want him to 'Just Do Something,' do you?"

"Well, I would like him to mow the yard!" she joked.

"Tammy," I continued, "you just want him to love you because he's your husband, you're his bride, and he loves you."

"Exactly!" she replied.

Exactly.

Jesus simply wants the same. He wants us to serve him, worship him, love him, follow him, and volunteer to change diapers in the nursery—not out of obligation, but out of affection.

Do you know that Jesus wants us to love him?

Hold that thought.

DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE LOVED?

Last week, a woman from my congregation came to my office with a lot of pain and a lot of questions that I couldn't answer—and one that I could.

In a moment of anguish she cried, "What can I do to make God love me more?"

What can we do to make God love us more?

Nothing. He can't love us more than he already does.

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, wrote, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

We are "so loved" by God.

DEVOTED

You ever been “so loved”?

My daughter’s stuffed Simba was “so loved.” Ashton—who was about seven at the time—cried all the way home from the Orlando Arena when I returned to the van with the bad news that her Simba was nowhere to be found. That stuffed lion never knew how much it was loved because it never lived.

You’ve never lived until you know how much God loves you.

John also wrote:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:7-11)

Love does not begin with us; it begins with God. And the love he has for us is endless.

We can’t draw it out of him, and we can do nothing to earn it.

To know God is to know love.

Do you know God loves you? God is devoted to you.

How do I know this? How do I know God loves you and is devoted to you? How do we know that another person loves us?

That question seems like it should be easy to answer, yet I'm having a really hard time answering it.

How do you quantify the unquantifiable? How do you define the indefinable? How do you express the inexpressible?

As I look back now, with more understanding and insight into what my dad gave up for my siblings and me when we were growing up, I know—without a doubt—he loved us, because he demonstrated it through countless sacrifices. While we were still children and incapable of giving him much beyond our love and obedience, he regularly went without lunch so my siblings and I could afford our extra-curricular activities. He taught extra classes and took speaking engagements so we could afford to take vacations. He drove an old yellow Pontiac station wagon (a.k.a. “The Banana”) instead of a new, or even slightly new, car so he could keep his kids fed and clothed.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Every moment of my life, I've known only a faithful, steadfast love from my mom. She was a shelter to whom I could

DEVOTED

run with my broken heart, my broken dreams, and Dad's broken car, which I wrecked shortly after his death; I fell asleep at the wheel because I stayed up late talking to my girlfriend at college past curfew. Mom was up when I got home to hug me and let me know it was going to be okay. Mom's love never slumbers.

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations. (Deuteronomy 7:9)

I know my kids love me because they say nice things about me to others.

Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you. (Psalm 63:3)

I know my wife loves me because, through everything, her love has never failed.

The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
(Psalm 103:8)

Yes, God loves us.

TO KNOW GOD IS TO KNOW LOVE

But what is love?

The Bible teaches us that love is knowing God, because God is love. “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16).

To know God is to know the steadfast love of a Father who protects his anointed one from certain death (see Psalm 52:1). To know God is to know the pursuing love of a Father who will run to you—the Prodigal—the moment you turn your face toward home (see Luke 15:11-32). To know God is to know the boundless love of a Father who will not let anything separate him from his children (see Romans 8:38-39). To know God is to know the saving love of a Father who was willing for his Son to die so that you and I could live (see John 3:16).

But to know God is also to know how to love others. As John wrote, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

Are you having a hard time loving your boss? Then you don't really know God. Are you having a hard time loving your next-door neighbor who has the dog that barks all night? Then you don't really know God. Are you having a hard time loving your ex-wife and her new husband? Then

DEVOTED

you don't really know God. Are you having a hard time loving someone in your church? Then you don't really know God.

To know God is to love him, but to know God is also to love one another.

DO YOU LOVE THE LORD?

Do you love the Lord?

This is the most important question we can answer. I believe discipleship begins with the answer to that question.

Why do I believe that? Well, it's a question Jesus asked of the disciple whose message was going to be the foundation on which the church would be built. It was the question Jesus wanted answered before Peter began his ministry of discipleship.

At key moments in my life, I've confirmed the existence of love through questions:

“Do you want to be my girlfriend? If so, check the ‘Yes’ box.”

“Do you want to go out?”

“Do you want to go to homecoming?”

“Do you want to go to prom?”

“Do you want to go to a movie after devotions?”

“Do you want to get back together?”

“Will you marry me?”

“Do you love Rhonda and take her to be your lawfully wedded wife?”

Questions can confirm love, or at least the intent to love.
Do you love the Lord?

I have to ask. Sometimes the only way to truly confirm whether or not love exists is to ask.

Jesus asked Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

Peter answered, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

“Feed my lambs,” Jesus commanded.

Again Jesus asked Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you,” Peter replied.

“Tend my sheep,” Jesus commanded.

Yet again, Jesus asked the question that was the most important question that disciple and any disciple can answer before being truly ready to lead sheep: “Do you love me?”

“Lord, . . . you know that I love you,” Peter declared with grief taking up residence in his heart.

“Feed my sheep,” Jesus commanded before the questions ended and Peter was brought back—full circle—to how it all began, with those two words with which all disciples must reckon: “Follow me” (John 21:15-19).

Before Peter could follow and begin the greatest act of discipleship, Jesus wanted to confirm the existence of love. Jesus wanted to know that Peter was devoted to him, because he was devoted to Peter. Jesus wanted this from his disciple Peter, and I believe he wants the same thing from us. I know it’s what I want from the people I disciple.

DEVOTED

For too long I've asked new converts to Christianity the wrong questions:

“Are you reading your Bible?”

“Are you going to church services each week?”

“Are you praying?”

“Are you giving your tithes and offerings?”

“Are you serving Jesus?”

But I haven't been asking the one question that was so important to Christ that he asked it of Peter three times: “Do you love Jesus?”

Almost every week at Journey, I ask someone this question: “Do you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?” This is our version of the question Jesus asked Peter at a key point in his ministry: “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15), to which Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

I've publicly asked *that* question thousands of times, but until now, I've never publicly asked anybody the question Jesus publicly asked Peter three times: “Do you love Jesus?”

Interesting thing—Jesus strongly commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ (see Matthew 16:20), and he taught that the commandment we should obey most strongly is to “love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] mind”

(Matthew 22:37). Why then do we ask new believers to confess the one thing that Christ commanded his disciples *not* to say and then not ask them to confess the one thing he commanded us to do?

Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that we stop asking people to publicly confess their faith in Christ. The answer to that question has eternal implications. Early in his ministry, Jesus taught that "everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32). But Jesus said that the greatest thing we can do is to love him.

How then have we gotten it so wrong?

Both confessions—what we believe about Christ and what we feel toward Christ—are good, essential, and life changing. Peter's confession of love for Christ was as foundational to the church as was his "Great Confession."

The church without the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, is not the church, but a gathering of delusional heretics. The church without love is a gathering of religious Pharisees. But the church made up of confessing Devotees primarily motivated by a passionate love for Jesus is unstoppable.

What would happen in your church and in your community if, when taking someone's confession of faith, we asked the right questions? "Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and do you love him?"

Love without faith can still be love, but according to the inspired Word of God, faith without love is not faith at all.

THE DEVOTED ONES

For years I've taught that the book of Acts is a history book, but I now believe I've been wrong. Yes. I know, I know. It *is* a book that contains the history of the church, but as I read Acts umpteen times while preparing to write this book, I became convinced that Acts is really a love letter. The book of Acts details the love of a Savior for this world, the love of disciples for their Teacher, and the love of the church for their Lord.

So that's how we're going to approach this journey together. We're reading a love letter to learn better how to love Jesus.

In the church I serve, we are seeing many people come to Christ. As I write this, we've baptized 210 people so far this year, which creates a really good problem for us: We have a lot of new Christians who need to be discipled. So the leadership team of the church started looking for a good discipleship plan that would help us raise up disciples who were passionately in love with Jesus.

We found some good plans out there, but they were all essentially teaching new Christians the same things: Read your Bible more, pray more, go to church every week, start tithing, tell lost people about Jesus, and don't sin. These are all really good things to do, but we didn't want to give our new Christians a list of to-do items. We wanted to give our new Christians an opportunity to fall more in love with Jesus.

We wanted something more for our new Devotees.

Yes—Devotees.

In the New Testament, the word that is used more than any other word to define followers of Christ is the word *disciple*. And I love that name! I'm a humble but proud disciple of Jesus Christ, and I wish to take nothing away from that biblical term. So let me be very clear here: By referring to followers of Christ as *Devotees* in this book, I am not suggesting that the name *disciple* be discarded. By no means!

That being said, the word *disciple* may carry some baggage with both long-term followers of Christ and new believers. So throughout this book—where appropriate—I will use the term *Devotee* because I believe it most clearly defines the kinds of disciples of Christ I hope to raise up.

The standard definition of a disciple is someone who is a student or follower of a teacher, leader, or philosopher. The word *student* takes my mind to a classroom where I find myself listening to lectures, taking a test for which I'm not prepared, and fighting to stay awake. The word *follower* makes me think of standing in a long line at Walt Disney World, in the hot sun, with a bunch of other people walking slowly and steadily toward a destination that may or may not be truly “magical.”

A Devotee, on the other hand, is someone who is a fanatical adherent to an individual or to a system of beliefs.

The word *Devotee* sets my heart on fire! Yes, I am a student and follower of Jesus Christ, but I want so much more than knowledge and proximity to Christ. I want passion for Christ—I want to be a fanatical Devotee!

I'm not preaching against being a student and follower of Jesus. I want to raise up a generation of disciples who are fanatically devoted to Christ.

I want you to reconsider both what it means to be fanatically devoted to Christ and what could happen if we honestly evaluate the process by which most churches "make disciples." Consider a new paradigm: love for Jesus.

Churches all over the country are reporting many new disciples as they implement the ingredients for evangelism I wrote about in my book *Eats with Sinners*. Regularly, I'm contacted by churches that have just finished using *Eats with Sinners* in a church-wide program and want to know, "What now? Do you have anything we can use to disciple all of these new believers?"

For several years I've had to say, "No, not yet."

As I prayerfully considered writing a sequel to *Eats with Sinners*, I became more convinced it needed to be a book that helped new Christ-followers build an intentional relationship with God. In *Eats with Sinners* I defined evangelism as an intentional relationship through which someone is introduced to Jesus. In this book I define discipleship as an intentional relationship through which a Christian helps another Christian fall more in love with Jesus.

A book for disciples that does not contain a plan for being a better disciple, but a plea for all disciples to be better at loving Jesus.

A book for disciples who want to love Jesus more today than they did yesterday.

A book for disciples who prefer affection to obligation and aren't content with a mere plan for becoming a better disciple of Jesus.

A book for disciples who want a deeper relationship with Jesus because they know that true discipleship is not a set of rules to be lived but a Savior to be loved.

A book by a disciple of Jesus who knows that disciples who love Jesus will serve him, follow him, give to him, tell people about him, and live for him—not because they have to, but because they want to.

A book for disciples who want to be as devoted to Christ as he is to us.

A book for disciples who want to be fanatically devoted to Christ.

A book that presents a new paradigm for making disciples: love. Just love.

A book that raises up a generation of disciples who prefer to be called “Devotees.”

My friend Mark Scott's youngest daughter, Allison, had been studying the Bible and praying for long periods of time, seeking God's will for her future. Last year, she entered Ozark Christian College not knowing what God wanted her to do with her life and not sure she would stay beyond the first semester.

But over dinner during winter break, she told her parents her desire was now to graduate from Ozark. When they asked what had changed and why she now wanted to stay in school, she boldly proclaimed, “I just love Jesus!” I believe

DEVOTED

true discipleship is not about what you do; it's about whom you love.

It's not about religion; it's about a relationship with Jesus. It's not about obligation to Christ; it's about affection for Christ. It's not about following a plan; it's about falling more in love with Jesus. It's not about duty; it's about devotion. It's not just about confessing our faith; it's also about confessing our love.

And, it's not about leading new converts through “Ten Simple Steps for Becoming a Better Disciple”; it's about raising up a generation of Devotees who explain each step of faith by boldly proclaiming, “I just love Jesus!”

CHAPTER 1: WAITING

TRUE LOVE WAITS



And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.

— Acts 1:4

AMANDA SAT WITH ME and my wife late one night on our back porch. She felt like she wasn't pleasing God because she wasn't currently involved in any ministries at church. With tears spilling onto her cheeks, she said, "I feel like I need to be doing more for God."

In a moment, I'll tell you what I told her, but you're going to have to be patient.

I can be very impatient. Stoplights are almost unbearable. Don't send me long e-mails. Get to the point, already! I'm always the first one up on Christmas morning. I have a hard time waiting the two minutes and twenty seconds it takes to make microwave popcorn, so I often pull it out before

DEVOTED

it's done popping—only to lament the number of unpopped kernels in the bottom of the bowl. If possible, I always use the “Self Checkout” lane at the grocery store and also always get annoyed if I have to wait behind a person who is trying to buy twenty-five items with a check in the “15 Items or Less; Cash Only” lane! I always fast-forward through the previews on the rental DVD so we can get to the movie. I DVR NASCAR races so I can race through the commercials and caution flags, finishing most of the four-hour races in less than an hour. And, I struggle with finishing my wife's sentences for her because I'm trying to move the conversation along.

I know, I know. That's not just really annoying; it's also not conducive to a healthy relationship with my wife or anyone else for that matter.

One of the hallmarks of true love is patience.

Hello! The first word from Paul on love is, “Love is patient” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

TRUE LOVE WAITS

To some, the words *True Love Waits* may be nothing more than the tagline of a Christian youth abstinence movement which has been engraved on purity rings, pendants, T-shirts, keys, bracelets, dog tags, visors, journals, Bibles, hoodies, bumper stickers, Christmas tree ornaments, buttons, infant bodysuits, baby bibs, teddy bears, thank-you cards, tote bags, mouse pads, coffee cups, pajamas, boxers, and thongs¹ worn by countless teens and young adults who have pledged to not have sex before marriage, which is a good thing. Not

having sex before marriage, that is. Testifying to your vow of premarriage celibacy on the front of your boxers or thong is not necessarily a good thing. At that point you may actually just be testifying that your moral convictions are really only abstract ideas to which you are barely committed and which can be stripped away as easily as your outer garments, revealing words that really don't resonate on polished cotton and lace as well as they resonate when pledged at the altar of a Christian teen convention.

Do you see the irony of wearing undergarments that testify to your belief that "True Love Waits"? The only way for said undergarments to be seen is for someone to not wait on the appropriate side of your boundaries of sexual purity (which doesn't seem to be very loving to you), or for you to compromise your own moral boundaries for the desires of another (which doesn't seem to be very loving to yourself).

If you truly love someone, you will wait.

You will wait so you can walk her home from the bus stop.

You will wait patiently in her living room, making uncomfortable small talk with her dad, as she changes her dress for the tenth time.

You will wait to have sex with her until safely within the covenant of marriage.

You will wait for her at the front of the church in anticipation of the proclamation of sacred promises.

You will wait as he serves our country in a foreign land.

You will wait up, with a candle in your window, so you can kiss him good night when he gets home from work.

DEVOTED

You will wait for her to finish her sentences on her own.

You will wait in the surgery waiting room, hoping for news that the cancer hasn't spread.

And, you'll wait in Jerusalem because that's what Jesus said to do.

Are you willing to wait for Jesus?

I don't want you to rush this relationship-with-Jesus thing. Let's take it slowly. Let's be patient. I don't want you to start working for the Lord right now; I want you to start waiting on the Lord right now.

Which is not the course of action we preachers most often encourage in new Christians. What we most often encourage new Christians to do is nothing. You give your life to the Way, and we give you no direction on how best to follow Christ for the next week, let alone for the rest of your life.

Typically, we preachers just let you start doing whatever it is you think new Christians do after their conversion, which typically looks like reading through the Bible from beginning to end, praying twenty-four hours a day, giving all of your money to starving kids in Kenya, joining a small group, and going to church every time the doors are open. In my experience, these activities by new Christians rarely last very long because they are a lot of work.

And, if we do "do something" to give you some direction after your conversion, it usually looks like this. Before you've even dried off the waters of the baptistery, we hand you a Bible, a Certificate of Baptism (a document necessary for admission to heaven), a schedule of our Sunday school classes, and a

directory of our small groups—and if we’re really on the ball, we hand you a copy of *The Purpose Driven Life*, pat you on the back appropriately, and send you on your way down the uneventful and completely trouble-free road to eternal glory.

As I’ve fallen more and more in love with Jesus and become more devoted to him, I’ve become more convicted that the best thing to do at the beginning of a relationship with Jesus is to do what Jesus did at the beginning of his ministry and what the disciples were commanded to do at the beginning of their ministries: Wait.

After his baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into a wilderness for forty days. Jesus waited forty days after his baptism to begin his ministry. During this time he fasted, prayed (fasting was always accompanied by prayer), and was tempted by the Devil.

This is so atypical of what we preachers model and expect of new Christians. If we’d been running the show (so to speak), we would have had Jesus get right to work as soon as he dried off and changed clothes after his baptism.

“The clock is ticking!”

“You gotta make hay while the sun is shining!”

“You’ve got to strike while the iron’s hot!”

“Today is the day of salvation!”

“The salvation of a lost world is at stake, so we’ll have none of this taking forty days off to wait upon your Father right after your baptism.”

Which is why so many new Christians flame out too soon.
Do you know what Jesus didn’t do after his baptism?

He didn't go to the synagogue for over a month.

He didn't pay a single tithe.

He didn't take a new believers' class.

He didn't read from the Torah.

He just followed the Holy Spirit into a time of waiting.

The salvation of a lost world is at stake, so you better take forty days to wait upon the Lord after your baptism.

Do you see how bizarre this is, in light of what we typically expect from new Christ-followers? This is the opposite of what we consider to be true discipleship. I think there'd be considerable resistance in the typical church if the pastor expected people to follow Christ's example.

"Congratulations on giving your life to Christ and being baptized! Now, here's what we want you to do. We want you to not go to church for the next forty days. We don't want you to pay a dime toward your tithe. We don't want you to sign up for our New Believers' Class. We don't want you to read your Bible. We just want you to follow the Holy Spirit into a season of waiting."

For so many of us—and by "us," I mean Christian leaders and people who have spent decades in the church—this does not fit into the paradigm we call "discipleship."

We Christians, convicted that "now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2), have convinced ourselves that, in most situations, waiting is a waste of time, and when it comes to our faith walk, waiting is almost sinful. But these beliefs are nonsense, unbiblical, and toxic to developing a healthy and lasting relationship with Jesus.

The Bible is replete with faithful people who had to wait faithfully.

God promised Noah, “I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you” (Genesis 6:18). But Noah had to wait probably twenty to forty years for this promise to be realized.

Abraham was seventy-five years old when God first promised him, “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3). But Abraham and Sarah had to wait twenty-five more years for the birth of Isaac.

Joseph was only seventeen when God gave him a dream revealing that his brothers would bow down before him (see Genesis 37:1-11). But he had to wait about twenty-four years, enduring thirteen years in Potiphar’s house and in prison and seven years of famine, before his prophetic dreams were fulfilled.

The children of Israel waited in the silence of God for about four hundred years in Egypt before he responded and sent Moses to deliver them. They then waited for forty years in the wilderness before finally being released into the Promised Land.

King David, while waiting under the threat of adversaries and “false witnesses,” testified, “Wait for the LORD; be strong,

DEVOTED

and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!” (Psalm 27:14).

Hannah desperately wanted a son, so she prayed and waited faithfully for years and years before God finally answered her prayer “in due time” with Samuel (1 Samuel 1:20).

When the people of God were waiting for deliverance during a time of intense trials during the reign of King Ahaz, the prophet Micah testified, “But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me” (Micah 7:7).

Prophesying of the time when God’s people would be held captive in Babylon, Isaiah promised, “Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:30-31). Isaiah also said, “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him” (Isaiah 64:4).

The author of Lamentations (probably Jeremiah the prophet) reminded the people of God, after the fall of Jerusalem, “The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD” (Lamentations 3:25-26).

Rewards, strength, and salvation are all promises tied to waiting on the Lord, so we should not be surprised that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into a forty-day period of waiting before beginning his ministry.

And we should not be surprised that before the apostles began their ministry in Jerusalem, Jesus appeared to them for a period of about forty days and ordered them to stay in Jerusalem “to wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4).

WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

We want results and we want them now and we want them to come without a great deal of effort.

Spend some time watching late-night TV, and you'll see what I mean. The late-night airwaves are saturated with a constant stream of resources, plans, and gadgets that will improve your life immediately, satisfaction guaranteed (or you'll get your money back, in sixty to ninety days).

If you feel like thirty seconds is too long to open your can of soup with an “old-fashioned” hand-crank can opener, the Tornado Can Opener is an answer to your prayers! It will open your cans in twenty-five seconds!

Think that it takes too much time to clean your ears with a cotton swab? No worries! WaxVac will clear the wax out of your ears quicker than a cotton swab ever dreamed of!

Forget going to the barbershop or hair salon. Trimming your hair now takes only seconds with Micro Touch Max!

Want fantastic abs? Forget those silly crunches and sit-ups! The Ab Rocket will give you great abs in just five minutes a day! Plus, it comes with the Fat Blasting System! Blast your fat into cellulite oblivion with minimal effort and even less sweat!

Want to transform your entire body in fewer than sixty days? Then you'd be crazy not to try the INSANITY Workout!

DEVOTED

If that doesn't work, you can wear the Slim Away girdle and you'll look slimmer instantly!

And, if that doesn't work, you can join the countless others who spend \$1.2 billion² annually just to have your fat sucked away in only moments . . . while you sleep!

I don't know if you've realized it, but exercise is hard work.

Well, so is waiting, which is why Jesus had to order the apostles to stay and to wait (see Acts 1:4).

STOP, IN THE NAME OF LOVE!

Do you know who else needs to be ordered to "stay" and wait? My two Labrador retrievers! My cat, on the other hand, ignores any and all orders, but that's another story for an article I'm writing on eschatology entitled "Welcome to Hell! Here's Your Cat!"

Animals aren't known for their self-control. Neither are immature Christians.

Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit and is also evidence of true devotion to Jesus.

Jesus, knowing the human propensity for chasing after cars, orders his followers to follow him in waiting for forty days before beginning their ministries.

But why wait?

Why did Jesus wait forty days before preaching the gospel in Nazareth? Why did the apostles wait fifty days before preaching the gospel in Jerusalem? Why am I about to order . . . ask . . . beg you to wait forty days before you do anything else?

Because I want you to have a relationship with Jesus.

Because I want you to be strong.

Because I want you to have a strong relationship with Jesus.

Do you know that the Law of Moses required a newly married soldier to be relieved of duty for a year so he could spend time with his wife?

When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be liable for any other public duty. He shall be free at home one year to be happy with his wife whom he has taken. (Deuteronomy 24:5)

Why did God command this of a newly married man? Because God understands relationships more than we ever could, and he wanted Israelite marriages to be strong. The first year of marriage is crucial to the long-term stability and strength of the relationship, so it was important that the new couple spend uninterrupted time together. This phase of the relationship—this period of inaction and waiting—was a God-ordained opportunity to strengthen the relationship and guarantee future fruitfulness.

Inaction, for the Devotee of Christ, is not a sign of weakness but an opportunity for strength. Waiting, for the Devotee of Christ, is not a sign of unfruitfulness but the only way to be truly fruitful.

DEVOTED

I believe one of the reasons the apostle Paul was used in such a dynamic way to help people see the truth was because he had to wait. After encountering God in a transformational way on the road to Damascus, he was forced into a three-day period of waiting in blindness before he was released into his ministry (see Acts 9:9).

Jesus wanted the apostles to be fruitful, so he ordered them to wait for something very specific: the promise of the Father. What promise was God going to give them if they were willing to wait?

Wait for it.

Wait for it.

Power, in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised that if they would stop and wait in Jerusalem, at just the right time and in just the right way the Father would give them all of the power they were going to need to do everything they were going to be called upon to do.

Power.

Do you feel powerful? Any physical trainer will tell you that you don't get more powerful sitting around and doing nothing. I'm not your physical trainer, and I could not care less how much you can lift, how far you can run, and how many trans fats you ate today. I only care about one thing right now: Do you love Jesus?

Do you love him enough to stay? "And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem" (Acts 1:4).

Do you love him enough to wait for him? “But to wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4).

Do you love him enough to wait for him to speak to you? “He said to them . . .” (Acts 1:7).

Do you love him enough to wait for him to empower you? “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Do you love him enough to wait for him to direct you? “And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

In his book *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini writes, “Of all the hardships a person had to face, none was more punishing than the simple act of waiting.”³

Waiting for a call to see if you got the job.

Waiting for payday.

Waiting for your son to return from his tour of duty overseas.

Waiting for the positive pregnancy test and then waiting for the birth.

Waiting for the doctor to come out and tell you how your father’s surgery went.

Waiting for the results of the biopsy.

Waiting can be punishment, but in my experience it’s easier to endure hardships while one waits if what is desired is worth the wait.

As we begin this journey together, I’m not asking you to take another step.

I’m not asking you to sign up for a 101 class. I’m not

DEVOTED

asking you to start reading through the Bible so you can finish by the end of the year. I'm not asking you to take a spiritual-gifts inventory. I'm not asking you to join a small group. I'm not asking you to sign up for the next mission trip to Mexico. I'm not asking you to volunteer for the third shift in the nursery.

Over the next forty days, God may ask you to do some, or all, of these things—but I won't.

It's like a honeymoon. The honeymoon is an important time in a marriage relationship. It's where a couple starts to really get to know each other in an emotional, physical, spiritual, and biblical sense.

Yes, I just said “biblical” sense. Let me remind you about this verse from Genesis: “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain” (Genesis 4:1). The word *knew* in this verse (*yada* in Hebrew) means “to have sexual intercourse.” During the honeymoon period of a marriage, a couple takes their relationship to a new level by getting to “know” each other. Intimacy breeds strong relationships.

I'm asking you to put down your sword, go home, and get to know your new spouse.

I'm asking you to view this stage of your relationship with Jesus as a honeymoon period.

I'm asking you to enter into a God-ordained opportunity to strengthen your new relationship with Christ with the hopes that this time of waiting will guarantee future fruitfulness.

I'm asking you to do what I asked Amanda to do when she said, "I feel like I need to be doing more for God."

When, through tears, Amanda wondered what "more" she needed to "do" to be more pleasing to God, I echoed the words scripted by the psalmist, sung by the saints of old, and soothing to the devoted soul, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

Stay!

Wait.

Be still.

As we begin this journey toward a deeper devotion to Christ, I'm asking you to follow Christ's example and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you into, and through, a forty-day period of waiting.

Follow *The 40-Day Devoted Experience* not out of duty but out of devotion.

Don't be reckless, unfaithful, or unguarded during this period. Remember, Christ endured a direct attack from Satan during his forty days of waiting in the wilderness. Know that Satan wants to break your heart the moment you offer it to Christ.

Keep going to church. Keep praying. Read your Bible. Worship.

Give. Make wise choices. Pay your taxes. Bathe. Show up to work on time. Keep reading this book.

Yet, all the while, be still before the Lord.

I'm not asking you to be disobedient; I'm asking you to be devoted to waiting upon the Lord with the hopes that you

DEVOTED

will become more devoted to the Lord upon whom you've been waiting.

So what does waiting for the Lord over the next forty days look like? In the stillness of the next forty days, simply follow the example of the apostles in Acts 1.

Love Jesus enough to stay . . . resolved not to move until he says so.

Love Jesus enough to wait for him . . . to show up.

Love Jesus enough to wait for him to speak to you . . . as to his specific plan for your life.

Love Jesus enough to wait for him to empower you . . . for every good work he has prepared for you to do.

Love Jesus enough to wait for him to direct you . . . on how you can fall more and more in love with him.

I've written the rest of this book to facilitate meditation, reflection, and increased devotion over the next forty days. I pray that, as you continue to read through this book, you'll hear clearly from the Lord.



The relief and release that Amanda experienced at the proclamation of that Scripture was physically evident.

She stopped crying.

She sat up.

She breathed a literal sigh of relief.

She smiled.

"Amanda, do you know that Jesus loves you?" I asked.

"Yes, I do," she replied.

“Amanda,” I continued. “Do you love Jesus?”

She paused, smiled sincerely, and said enthusiastically, “Yes, I do.”

To which I said, “Then, be still and wait.”

In the midst of her pain and confusion, Amanda had forgotten it was okay to wait upon the Lord. Like so many of us, she’d allowed herself to believe that the only way she could truly please the Lord was by doing more work for God.

Somehow she’d missed and forgotten the message so clearly written on the front of the undergarments worn by well-meaning Christian teens and singles from sea to shining sea: *True love waits.*