One of the brutally hard lessons I had to learn as a young pastor was this: For Americans aged forty and under, the spiritual disciplines are pretty much gone. And in the digital age—when multinational corporations such as Apple, Google, and Facebook are spending billions of dollars to make distraction and addiction the new normal—we desperately need to reawaken these ancient practices. After all, the way of Jesus is just that—a way of life. I’m thrilled to see Daniel, my fellow Pacific Northwest pastor, writing about these very practices. I deeply believe they are key to the future of the church.

JOHN MARK COMER
Pastor for teaching and vision at Bridgetown Church and author of God Has a Name

A life committed to loving God, loving self, and loving others—upward, inward, outward—is an art. Daniel Fusco is a winsome and pastoral guide on this journey, which will leave you “insanely hopeful.”

ROBERT GELINAS
Lead pastor of Colorado Community Church

I always appreciate the unique way in which Daniel nuances the basic truth about life. He tackles difficult issues with grace and simplicity and helps us all look more intently at Jesus.

JEREMY CAMP
Songwriter and recording artist

Author, pastor, and musician Daniel Fusco writes like the jazz musician he is—and you can’t help but be drawn
into the dynamic rhythm and sway of his words about life with the King of kings. Fusco takes you on an energetic and fun journey through the greatest commandment, inviting you to connect intimately with God and with others and encouraging all of us to lead lives of passion and legacy—all to the glory of our creative and wonderful Jesus.

AUBREY SAMPSON
Author of *Overcomer: Breaking Down the Walls of Shame and Rebuilding Your Soul*

Ever since I first met Daniel, I have been blessed by his commitment to Scripture, his passion for the lost, and his dedication to the church. He is a gifted teacher, an engaging communicator, and a humble follower of Jesus who wants nothing more than to see others thrive in their own walks with God. I’m excited to see how God uses this book to inspire, challenge, and motivate others to live into their fullest potential in Christ.

LUIS PALAU
World evangelist and author of *Out of the Desert . . . Into the Life God Fully Intended*

This is a grace-filled, gospel-focused, joy-inducing book that will deepen your walk with Jesus. I’m grateful for Daniel’s work and inspiring passion.

DR. PHILIP NATION
Pastor and author of *Habits for Our Holiness*

In his newest book, *Upward, Inward, Outward*, Daniel Fusco takes us beyond the *theory* of loving God and others
and into the practical reality of what it means to do so daily. I encourage you to let him guide you through three of the most important things we’re called to do: love God, love ourselves, and love others. You’ll be glad you did.

LARRY OSBORNE
Pastor of North Coast Church and author of Sticky Teams

With the same finesse, expertise, and splash of funk he famously exhibits on the bass guitar, Pastor Daniel Fusco has composed a virtual discipleship jam session in Upward, Inward, Outward. It’s simple, rich, and foundational—not unlike the gospel it explains.

JESSIE MINASSIAN
Blogger at LifeLoveandGod.com and author of Unashamed and Family

This book is important. It’s beautifully written because Daniel writes about what’s important to Jesus—love. As you read this book, you will become more loving toward God, yourself, and others.

DERWIN L. GRAY
Pastor of Transformation Church and author of Limitless Life: You Are More Than Your Past When God Holds Your Future

Our identity drives our activity, and when we know who God is and who he says we are, it changes everything. In this book Pastor Daniel Fusco does a phenomenal job helping us learn the art of loving God, loving ourselves, and loving people through different lenses such as worship, fasting, and community.

LEVI LUSKO
Pastor of Fresh Life Church and author of Through the Eyes of a Lion
It’s not enough to just know the right things—God wants to help us walk in what we know. Daniel Fusco shares spiritual truths in ways we can all respond to, understand, and grasp. He does it again in this new book, sharing some of the most important ways we can follow Jesus.

MATT BROWN
Evangelist, author, and founder of Think Eternity

Daniel has written a book that is dripping with truth, love, and audacity. This is a book everyone needs to read over and over again.

JARRID WILSON
Pastor and author of Love Is Oxygen

This book will revolutionize your thinking and help revive every area of your life. Daniel’s authenticity takes us on a journey toward living the life God intended for you—upward, inward, outward—which will give you the inspiration to strengthen your relationship with Jesus regardless of where you are in your faith walk.

TIM TIMBERLAKE
Author of Abandon and pastor of Christian Faith Center
Upward, Inward, Outward

Love God
Love yourself
Love others

Daniel Fusco

with D. R. Jacobsen

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Thank you, Father, Son, and Spirit,
for inviting me to live and love
upward, inward, and outward.
Thank you for my beautiful family—
Lynn, Obadiah, Maranatha, and Annabelle—
who fill my world with such life!
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If you’re reading this, I know something extraordinary about you: You’re alive.

That’s a tremendous gift—and it’s also terrifying. The life you’re living right now, the life I’m living? It’s not a dress rehearsal. This is the real deal.

I’ll be honest—that terrifies me as the one writing this book. The glued-together stack of paper you’re holding, or the e-book, is part of your actual life. If you read it, then you won’t get the time back. So I want to make the time count, yours and mine, by talking about what truly matters in life. The things that give us actual purpose and joy.

So let’s take a journey together that will truly change us. Life shouldn’t be about checking another book off some list. If we take the time to read something, it had better help us live in a new way.

Which takes us to the art of living. If we get only one shot at today, at life, how can we best live? Who should we be? How should we move through our days?

Turns out that God can show us what we’re looking for.
It probably won’t surprise you to hear that the Old Testament contains a ton of commandments—a whopping 613 of them!

But in the New Testament, Jesus sums up all of them in a single commandment: Start by loving God with your entire being, and follow that up with loving others the way you’d like to be loved.¹

We see this in God’s Word in a section usually called “The Greatest Commandment.” Here’s the version told in the Gospel of Mark:

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

¹ It has two parts, sure, but it’s still a single commandment. Like how a burger and fries are a single order.
When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.2

The scene starts when a first-century superlawyer—not a court-of-law practitioner but an expert in the law of Moses—asks Jesus a question. And the question seems to be motivated by a pretty good instinct. (Just because he’s a lawyer doesn’t make him the bad guy in the story!) He notices that Jesus is giving some great answers to all the trick questions that the religious leaders are peppering him with.

So he goes for the CliffsNotes! Remember those? You’d have a test coming up about, say, Moby Dick, except you were only on page 13 of the book and the test was the next day. So you’d grab one of those black-and-yellow lifesavers, and an hour later you’d be set.3 That’s similar to what the superlawyer is doing. He must be thinking to himself, This teacher knows all the answers. Let’s take a shortcut through all the extra stuff to see if he can answer the question that actually matters!

It’s our question too. How are we meant to live? With all the distractions and different ways of living, what’s the main thing . . . and then how do we actually live it out?

Upward, Inward, Outward

As we see in Mark 12, Jesus’ answer is deceptively simple: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all

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2 Mark 12:28-34.

3 If you have no idea what I’m talking about, then just substitute “Google” for “CliffsNotes.”
your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength . . . [And] love your neighbor as yourself” (verses 30–31).

Heart, soul, mind, and strength.

These make up your control center, your emotions and will, your intellect, and your bodily abilities—pretty much all of you!

During the time when Jesus was ministering, faithful Jews would have recited part of the greatest commandment every day. Some of them would even have carried it around on index cards in their pockets or had it displayed on the lock screens of their phones. It was a big deal . . . but Jesus did something even bigger with it.

See, there’s a movement to what Jesus talks about here, and the movement defines our lives.

Upward, inward, outward.

That’s the movement described in the greatest commandment. Loving God takes us up, learning how to love ourselves takes us in, and then we go out and love our neighbors.

And what’s fascinating about Jesus’ answer is that we already live upward, inward, and outward. We can’t help it. All of us relate to God in a certain way, all of us treat ourselves a certain way, and all of us treat others a certain way.

Jesus isn’t telling us to do something no human has ever done. He’s not saying, “Fly like a bird!” or “Run at the speed of light!” or “Live life from old age to infancy!” Rather, he’s saying we need to make sure that what we’re already doing, naturally, is properly oriented.

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4 Let the reader understand.
And why do we naturally live upward, inward, and outward? Because we were created to! But what if I told you that the needs you feel on a moment-by-moment basis are designed to draw you into a new way of living?

Let that land for a moment.

The needs you experience are invitations.

Let me explain. All of us are created with deep, profound needs, so naturally we seek to satisfy those needs. But unfortunately, we often seek to satisfy those needs in ways that are not only unsatisfying but also sometimes downright harmful.

We often mistake distraction for satisfaction! But a need deferred or ignored is not the same as a need fulfilled. That’s why Jesus invites us into God-designed ways of living that will meet our needs as nothing else ever can.

But it’s up to us to respond to this invitation to join him on the journey.

And don’t miss the fact that God’s way of living is also the way of loving. We don’t just live in three directions—Jesus invites us to love in three directions.

Your deepest, most fundamental needs are invitations to love upward, inward, and outward.

And to properly respond to that invitation, we must be intentional about God and how we satisfy our needs. Instead of drifting through life or merely reacting to whatever happens to come our way, we need to figure out what’s best . . . and then do that!

Jesus understands that we need to know what life is about. All of it, and not just a single season, because our seasonal answers are insufficient.
When we’re teenagers, for example, we think life is all about the superlatives. We hope life grants us an identity such as smartest, coolest, funniest, hottest, fastest. That’s how it was for me, anyway, at Cedar Ridge High. When the yearbook came out, the first section we’d flip to was the class awards. And in 1994 I was finally immortalized with my own superlative: *Most Unique*.

For a former baseball jock who was too cool (and stoned) to play senior year, this was the pinnacle. Sure, student representative to the district school board was nice. Homecoming king was sweet. Student council president didn’t get me a lot of dates, but it would look good on my college applications.


What I didn’t understand at the time was that I wasn’t the most unique . . . and neither was anyone else!

All of us at Cedar Ridge High were just kids trying to find our place in the world. However we tried to construct that, we were still searching for meaning and purpose. We wanted to understand the art of living, but our methods were about as helpful as trying to empty a swimming pool with a coffee cup.

Too often we humans are satisfied with small definitions. Over the years I’ve inhabited many different roles: athlete, prep, stoner, musician, wanderer, pastor. None of those roles is *the* answer to life for me. The answer, in all those roles, is to practice the art of living.

To embody the greatest commandment and satisfy my God-given needs by living upward, inward, and outward.
Which takes us right back into the scripture we’re looking at. Reread the second half. The scribe considers Jesus’ answer, and he’s like, “You’re right, teacher. I agree! What you’ve said is the most important thing in the world!”

And then what Jesus doesn’t say is, “You agree? Great, it’s a done deal.”

Instead he thinks about the scribe’s wise answer and then says, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (verse 34).

In other words, outside the Kingdom of God. Not yet living there, as an insider.

But here’s the astounding part: Jesus’ words are an invitation, not a condemnation. Jesus is saying, “Come closer. Don’t be far away. Let me work in your life. You’re almost home.”

Taking the Next Step

So how do we bridge the distance between “not far” and “close to” Jesus?

By living in sync with the way we’ve been created.

God designed us completely, so he knows what it means to truly and fully live. That kind of living requires us to have a close connection to our Creator, which is the exact reason God has placed such deep needs within each of us. Without that connection, we’ll still find ourselves living upward, inward, and outward—except in all the wrong ways.

That’s why Jesus is so insistent we draw near. That we come closer. If we recognize how we’re created, then our upward, inward, outward lives will work how they’re designed to. We’ll be living in step with the God who loves us deeply. God also understands the best ways for us to love him and others.
Being that close to Jesus is when life becomes not only rich and real but also transformational.

Do not miss how critical that upward movement is. Loving upward drives us to life as God intended. If we are far from the Lord, then we will always love ourselves wrongly, which will always lead us to love others wrongly as well. If we are not loving upward, nothing else works.

That’s why we’ve got to live it! We’re not after the “art of thinking about God a little differently.” This is the art of living.

I love to call that art of living “Jesus spirituality”—which is ordinary people, like us, living in the deeply transformational way of Jesus.

See, information isn’t enough. Not even the right information can save us by itself. We have to act on that information. This is the definition of wisdom, by the way—acting the right way because we have the right information.

That’s why you’re reading this book: because you want to integrate what you learn with how you live.

God gives us the key in the greatest commandment, but we’ve got to do this stuff in the right order. Imagine I invite you to my sweet cabin by the lake. To start hanging out in that cabin, you need to get the key from me, pack your car, follow the GPS to the lake, and so on. There’s a natural order to it.

It’s the same with the greatest commandment.

We begin upward, with loving God. The God. God of the Old Testament, God of the New Testament. God the
Trinity—Father, Son, Spirit. We continue inward, with understanding our true identities in Jesus. And when we get those things right, God’s Spirit sends us outward, on mission into a hurting and wonderful world.

That’s how we’re going to go through this book—in three movements that mirror the greatest commandment.

Movement One: Upward
This will focus on God the Father through the lens of our need for meaning, connection, intimacy, and reflection.

Movement Two: Inward
This will focus on Jesus through the lens of our need for honesty, self-control, intentionality, and humility.

Movement Three: Outward
This will focus on God’s Spirit through the lens of our need for justice, self-expression, relationship, and compassion.

Discovering the art of living is a journey into the longings we were created with—and how God designed those longings to be met.

But we don’t travel alone. We walk alongside the God who made us and our needs, stepping forward in thought and action, belief and works. Life is hard. It can be tough and unrelenting and catch us by surprise. And since we get
only one shot at it, let’s follow Jesus. Let’s do it right. Let’s live Jesus spirituality.

Let me ask you: What would your life look like if you started to love God with every part of who you are? If you based your identity on the truth of Jesus? If God’s Spirit gave you the power to go out into the world, in God’s name, and transform it?

If you can honestly read those questions and go, “Meh, who cares?” then you should probably give this book to someone else. You could also use it as kindling the next time you go camping or as a paperweight, or you could leave it outside for the birds to make nests with.

But if those questions stirred something in you, then let’s take this journey together. Listen to what Jesus says in John 10:10: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

That’s a serious statement. He’s saying his life—birth, ministry, death, resurrection—exists for us. That’s insane.

And insanely hopeful. The greatest commandment leads us to a life that is full, satisfying, and joyful beyond anything we can imagine.

But we only get that life by living it. Day in and day out, at street level.

And remember, the clue about how to really live all of this is right there in the first word of Jesus’ answer to the scribe: love. If we’re supposed to love God and love ourselves and love our neighbors, then that’s got to be something we live out and act out. Like, no parent would say, “I can tell I love my daughter because I believe certain things about her.”
That’s not how love works. First John 3:18 says, “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” Loving a kid means cleaning up vomit and holding your tongue when they’re fourteen and think you’re the enemy. It means combing hair and teaching Bible verses and driving to practice and doing laundry and the million other things we parents do out of love.

Jesus’ invitation is getting at exactly that.

Love God, love ourselves, love others . . . with actions and in truth.

Jesus is promising us a life that is filled to overflowing with good things: joy, community, creativity, love, justice . . . pretty much the greatest hits of being alive. He says these things will permeate our lives and spill over into the world.

This is the life offered to those willing to simply respond to Jesus by taking the next step.
Movement 1

Upward

Love God
If we want to learn the art of living, we begin where Jesus did: with the one and only God.

What we believe about God is the furthest thing from abstract. What we believe about God has very real and very practical implications for the way we live each day. It actually drives everything about us.

Here’s an unfortunate current example. If you believe God wants to kill everyone who doesn't think exactly the same things you think, then you might conclude that your job is to be a holy warrior. You might even think that murdering people in the name of God is pleasing to God.

Tragically, the news is full of stories like this. It reminds me of a great quote: “You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”¹

The way we see—or don’t see—God has enormous consequences in our everyday lives. It literally influences everything we think and do.

That’s why we’re beginning our journey with God the Father. We’ve got to get things right with him before we can do anything else.

And God’s created us to do exactly that.

Remember, the needs deep within us are there for a reason: to make us needy! Our needs for meaning, connection, intimacy, and reflection are what point us—drive us, even—upward, to the only one who can truly satisfy them.

Are you ready to look up?

¹ Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Anchor, 1994), 22. She attributes this to her “priest friend Tom.”
Problem

Who are we? Why are we here? How do we find our place in this creative, painful, beautiful thing called life? What’s the main thing we should be keeping our eyes on? How can we not lose sight of that—and what’s the best way to accomplish it?

I know. That’s a ton of questions. Then again, we’ve got a ton of problems!

We all want to figure out life. We want to understand. We want to know what it all means. And that’s where I want to begin: with the simple premise that every person longs for meaning.

*Meaning* is both the way we define what matters most in life and how we pursue that. Meaning is how we decide
what’s more or less important—and if we’re lucky, it’s how we know what’s the most important thing of all.

I like how this psychologist puts it:

As human beings, we need to make meaning of our existence. Meaning gives definition to our life and our life path. This search for meaning is often challenging. How do we make sense of who we are within a world that seems out of balance with poverty, war, and famine on the one hand and tremendous privilege on the other?¹

I mentioned in the prelude that we’re going to be exploring what it means to live in three directions: upward, inward, and outward. And here in the first movement, we’re looking at what it means to live upward, which might seem a strange choice.

If we’re talking about the art of living, it seems as if inward (us) and outward (others) would be the most important. The reason we’re beginning upward, though, is that the way we understand God changes everything. I believe that with all my heart.

See, what we believe (or disbelieve) about God shapes the way we think and the way we act. That’s why figuring out how to live inward and outward depends on living upward. (If you don’t believe me, stick with me at least through this chapter and the next three chapters!)

Usually, though, we look for meaning in the next big life event, rather than in our relationship with God. *When I get to college. When I graduate. When I get my dream job. When I get married. When I have kids. When I own a house. When I get promoted.*

Those aren’t bad things. The problem comes when we expect them to provide a level of meaning that they can’t.

At some point we find ourselves asking why we cared so much. We might be sitting in our offices doing our “perfect” jobs, wondering why we ever expected *this* to make such a difference in our lives. There always comes a moment when the thing that was supposed to provide meaning *doesn’t*, and all we can say is, “Really? That’s it?”

What happens next is we figure we were chasing the wrong thing . . . so we chase the next thing instead.

The next job, the next relationship, the next amount of money. The “meaning treadmill” can last a lifetime—but it doesn’t have to. Meaning isn’t floating around somewhere, waiting to be captured. Meaning is *made*—it’s what happens at the intersection of upward/inward/outward. It’s what happens when what we think and believe is expressed in (or collides with) how we act. Part of the art of living is learning how to make the right meaning out of our lives.

And that depends on how we relate to God.

A lot of the time we’re like fish, swimming around our little aquariums. Now I don’t know much about the consciousness levels of fish, but I don’t imagine a fish thinking, *Wow, my water is so interesting today! I really notice it! It seems*
like it’s about, maybe, 0.3 degrees warmer, and it just feels so good sliding across my scales while I swim!²

Fish are like us when it comes to meaning! The most important thing in life—God, in whom we live, move, and have our being³—so often escapes our attention.

Which is why I’m glad you’re reading this, because I can ask you straight out: What is more important than your relationship with God?

I know that’s a “pastor” kind of question, but that doesn’t make it wrong! I mean, if there is a God who created and sustains everything (which I believe), then our relationship with God is ultimate.

Now here’s where I’m going to take us: We all need meaning, and because ultimate meaning can only be found in our relationship with God, worship is what satisfies our need for meaning.

You might be like, “Okay, Fusco, not sure I buy that. That’s a big jump you’re making.”

Yep, it is.

Promise

I want you to read the lyrics of a song I love. Kind of a golden oldie, except way older than Elvis. But it’ll always be a classic . . . and it happens to be about our need for meaning.

Praise the Lord.

Sing to the Lord a new song,

² I do think fish are continually surprised by their little plastic plants. But I digress.
his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.
Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;

    let the people of Zion be glad in their King.
Let them praise his name with dancing
    and make music to him with timbrel and harp.
For the LORD takes delight in his people;

    he crowns the humble with victory.
Let his faithful people rejoice in this honor
    and sing for joy on their beds.

That’s Psalm 149:1-5, and its theme is praise and worship—which just so happens to be the theme of the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

The Word tells the story of God and the story of people encountering God. Sometimes we honor God, and sometimes we dishonor God. It’s not God who is changing across those thousands of years—it’s us! Throughout every change, God continually and lovingly calls his children back to worship him.

Why? Because God deserves it, and because it is through worship we discover ourselves.

In the Ten Commandments, the first thing God tells us is that we should not worship anything other than God. Because he created us, God knows how prone we are to do exactly that.

We’re not just tempted to worship bad stuff either. Like, it’s obviously wrong to exploit the poor because we worship profit. But we even worship good stuff! We have a tendency to take good things and make them the most important things . . . which makes them bad things. Not bad because they’re inherently bad, but because they take the place of God.
And worshiping *anything* that takes the place of God ruins our quest for meaning.

It’s as though we’re lost in the woods at night and only one person has a flashlight. If we don’t make following that bobbing light our highest priority, we’re not going to make it back to the parking lot. Even a good thing, like a quick water break, becomes a bad thing if it takes the place of following the leader.

Here’s the thumbnail sketch of what biblical worship is. The word *worship* comes from *worth*, and the suffix *-ship*, which basically means having the “condition” or “quality” of something.\(^4\) So if something has *worth* to us, we *worship* it, at least to a certain extent. It’s possible for the same person to worship God, for example, and to worship football. Worship isn’t zero-sum. But it is true that only *one* thing can be on the throne of your heart.

So if we define our whole existence by how much money we make, guess what? Money will become our life. Same with our jobs, kids, sports, and so on.

We *want* it to be possible to serve two masters. We’d each love it if we could make God our number-one priority *and* make our job our number-one priority. Can’t we have it all?

Nope. Never.

That’s not how life works. We are one-master creatures. The minute we elevate something to the place of honor in our hearts, we dethrone everything else.

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It’s not a matter of if we’re worshiping. The real question is this: *Is what we’re worshiping worthy of defining our lives?* Because we’ll only find true meaning if the object of our worship is truly worthy.

**We Worship the Creator King Together**

So in general worship matters—just like the specifics of *who* and *how* we worship matter. Let’s go back to the first line of our song.

_Praise the Lord._

Now those three words are actually a single Hebrew word. *Hallelujah.* _Hallel_ means “praise,” and _ujah_ is talking about Yahweh, the Lord.⁵

The object of our praise shouldn’t be random. In fact, worshiping God is the only choice that makes sense. Why? Check out this line: *Let Israel rejoice in their Maker.*

We’re going to worship something, right? And there are tons of good things in our lives . . . *but none of those things created us.*

Only our Creator King understands the intention for which everything has been created. God doesn’t just know “how to provide meaning” in some abstract sense . . . God knows how to provide _you_ with the exact kind of meaning you are wired for. And God invites you to discover that through worship.

At this point, though, you might be thinking, *Well, if God’s the King, then there’s an awful lot of rebellion going on.*

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⁵ Ever heard a nonbeliever say, “Hallelujah”? Respond by saying, “Amen,” and tell ’em you’re glad they are praising God!
Why should I worship my Maker when he can’t seem to control his Kingdom?

Fair question! And guess what? You’re right—there’s a ton of rebellion going on! Thing is, we are the rebels. All of us. (Unless you’re perfect, in which case you probably don’t need to be reading this!) And God could fix everything right now. Sure, it would destroy our free will, but he could.

But check out why he doesn’t: The King’s will is that no one should perish and that all should come to him. Our Creator King hasn’t stamped down humanity’s rebellion against his royal authority because he wants us to be saved! If Jesus had come back twenty years ago, I would never have known him. And that happens every day, all around the world.

That’s the kind of king I love serving. The kind of king I will give my life for if needed. And the one I want to worship.

The best part is that when I worship, I get to stand beside my brothers and sisters in a worshiping community. Theologians call this corporate worship, which is just a fancy way of saying that all the parts of Christ’s body—all of us—come together for one purpose.

Worshiping together isn’t one way to worship. It’s the way to worship.

Now I’m not saying it’s impossible to worship alone. We worship in our cars and in cubicles and in solitary confinement. But those instances of worship connect us with our Creator King, and with Jesus, and are meant to propel us

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6 2 Peter 3:8-9.
7 The word corporate comes from corpus. As in corpse. But our corporate worship makes our dead bodies come alive, praise God (Ephesians 2:5).
back together to give thanks and learn and sing. In our sinful world, it isn’t always possible to worship together in community. But corporate worship is part of God’s design. Read Psalm 149:1 again: “Sing to the LOR D a new song, his praise in the assembly of his faithful people” (emphasis added).

This is one of the reasons I believe faithful, orthodox Christianity is such a challenge in the twenty-first-century West.

Think about it. Our culture is all about the individual. About me. My relationship with God, my experience at church, my family, my money, my hobbies. The list goes on and on. This is at the DNA level for most of us. But the interesting thing is that all through the Bible, it’s about community. About us and we and everyone. From Genesis 1:26 (“Let us make [humans] in our image . . .”) to Deuteronomy 6:4 (“Hear, O Israel: the LOR D our God”) to Jesus (“Our Father . . .”) to the Epistles (1 Corinthians 12 and 13) to our ultimate home (Revelation).

God saves us from our sins and places us into a worshiping community. (More on that later in chapter 3.3.)

That’s where we make the kind of meaning that will last a lifetime—and beyond.

**We Worship in the Spirit and in Truth**

Our need for meaning takes us to John 4, which tells the story of Jesus talking to someone scholars refer to as “the woman at the well.”

She was a Samaritan, which according to Jesus’ culture

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8 There’s a complex theological reason for this terminology: She was a woman . . . and she was at a well.
meant he should have hated her. And she was a multidivorcée living with her latest boyfriend, while he was an upstanding single man. Meaning he should have steered clear.

Before we continue, let that sink in for a sec: Jesus wasn’t just polite to people who crossed his path . . . he sought out people he was supposed to avoid!

Here’s what Jesus says to her in verse 24: “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

Our need for meaning is satisfied when we worship both in the Spirit and in truth. It’s like two sides of one coin. Better yet, it’s like looking at something with both eyes open. Using both eyes is what gives us 3-D vision and allows us to, for example, catch a baseball before it smacks us in the head. With only one eye open, what we see is flattened and limited.

Unfortunately, when it comes to worship, we’re really good at focusing on either the Spirit or the truth.

Let’s start with the Spirit. No matter what our backgrounds or denominations—or even personal preferences—we need to worship God expressively, in the Spirit. Psalm 149:3 shows us why. I love this: “Make music to him with timbrel and harp.” Whoever wrote this psalm didn’t know about the electric bass, obviously, but if they did? Make music to him with drums and bass!

You might be saying to yourself, “Bro, I just like to keep it low-key and not pretend to be all emotional about everything.”

If you’re saying that, don’t freak out. We’re not talking about your eternal salvation or anything.

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9 Or if you prefer the King James Version, “Freakest thou not!”
At the same time, however, I hope to show you a better way! Because when it comes to worship, some of us are too cool for school, and that completely misses God’s design for us.

Here’s an example. I love being a parent. And I love my son, Obadiah. Right now he’s at that age where he’s too cool to show affection for me in public. After a recent soccer game, I was going to wrap him up in a big hug. But he knew that, so he tried to go ninja on me and duck under the hug. Except I knew that he knew, and I snagged him anyway and said, “So now you’re too cool for me to put my arms around you?”

“No.”

“Then give Daddy a kiss. Come on, buddy . . . what’s going to happen if your friends see me kiss you?”

Pray for my son. I’m probably messing him up something good! Thing is, he loves me a ton. When we’re in the van or at home, he’s all about the hugs and chitchat and fist bumps and camaraderie. It’s just that when we’re in public, he has a different standard. Which is, basically, act like you don’t know me.

If that’s the way you worship, you’re doing it wrong. I’m just gonna tell you straight out, okay, and pray that you keep reading!

Sometimes we’re like (read this in your least expressive voice), “Yep, uh-huh, praise God. Mmm-hmm. Praise, praise, praise . . . are we done praising yet?”

But God isn’t just worthy of worship—God is worthy of passionate worship.

One of my favorite examples of this comes from 2 Samuel 6. You’ll have to read it yourself, but the main idea is that King David, who’s the most powerful person in the
whole land, gets so excited by worshiping God that he dances “with all his might” (verse 14). With a band, at a public parade. And did I mention he was in his underwear?

We probably shouldn’t show up to church next week in our tighty-whities, but we should allow the Spirit of God to move us and inspire us, even if it’s uncomfortable at first.

Okay, now that I’ve got us dancing in our underwear and praising God . . . let’s take a little Gatorade break and read the Word again. It’s time to look at how to worship in truth.

The truth—about God, about us, about our world—causes us to be humble. And humility causes us to seek out the truth, because we know we need it. If you were about to die of kidney failure and a stranger appeared out of nowhere to give you their kidney, you wouldn’t be like, “Um, thanks.”

You’d be more like, “Oh my goodness! Sorry for crying, and thank you infinity times infinity!”

When our worship highlights the truth of what God has done for us in Christ, we are humbled by that truth and then driven to even deeper worship.

And our need for meaning is truly satisfied.

Worshiping in the Spirit and in truth isn’t rocket science. We want to be followers of Jesus who avoid spiritual pitfalls, right? So on the one hand, we don’t want to be Bible thumpers who beat everyone up with truth truth truth. If we aren’t animated by the Spirit, the Bible becomes just a list of rules to judge everyone else by. On the other hand, we don’t want to be experience junkies, always chasing the next “spiritual” moment that gives us the shivers.

God has taken us from a life of rebellion and given us a
place in his family, and that’s where meaning surrounds us and motivates us. We become passionate about the art of living because of who God is and what God has done, not the other way around.

We don’t come to God and say, “Yep, of course you saved me—I deserved it!” Instead we cry out, “God, I can’t believe you saved me. Me, of all people!”

We ask God, “How can I ever thank you? How can I share what you’ve done?”

The answer to the first question is worship.
And the answer to the second question is worship!
Art-of-living worship. Our need for meaning always leads to worship—and worshiping our Creator makes the only kind of meaning that will satisfy us.

We Worship with Joy
I love how our psalm culminates in joy.

Joy is an easy sell because everybody wants it. But let me take us on a super quick detour, because we actually find joy somewhere unexpected.

In Romans 12:1, the apostle Paul says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” He’s saying we do this because of what God has already done for us. When you and I worship as people who are humbly saved, we find the art of living.

Richard Foster says it this way: “As worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in holy obedience.”

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Be honest: Does holy obedience sound boring and joyless? It’s the opposite! Holy obedience is worshiping with a community of friends. It’s being on mission together. It’s responding with gratefulness to God. And when we declare the worth of God with our lives, God shares his joy with us.

Our God is the most joyful person in the universe—and his joy subverts our expectations about what joy is. God’s joy does not depend on or ensure that everything works out perfectly. It isn’t circumstantial. God’s joy is the disposition of a heart that knows “it is well with my soul” because God is God. This is the joy he shares with us when we come to him with worship.

The thing about living with God’s joy, rather than our own, is that our souls can rest in God even when our life circumstances push us to fear or freak out. When I watch how followers of Jesus respond to suffering with joy, though, I see the only evidence I need that God is who God says.

When it comes to joy in hard circumstances, it’s a blessing and a curse to be a pastor. I see people in their greatest moments and in their worst moments. If the meaning we crave is found in worship, that meaning has got to make sense throughout all of life. All of life, even the parts that feel like they’ll break us, or else it’s counterfeit meaning.

Life isn’t pretty or neat. Life can hurt. Bad. I know too many people who have been absolutely crushed by pain. But when I see those very people stand up in the assembly of believers, hand over shattered heart, and worship with joy? Apart from God being God and delivering on every single promise, it makes no sense.
And when I see God’s joy in action, being lived out, it drives me to worship with joy. To worship the only one who can satisfy my need for meaning in this painful, beautiful life.

See how that works? We find true meaning when we worship God, together, with joy, in all of life.

Any lasting meaning must be built on our relationship with the one who means everything. Unless we worship the true and living God, all our attempts at worship will leave us unsatisfied, unfulfilled, and grasping at the air.

They’ll leave us searching for meaning and never finding it.

Maybe you’re saying, “I don’t know if you’re on target, Fusco. I can be happy in lots of ways. I can find meaning in lots of things.”

You’re right. We can find meaning in lots of things.

But there is only one place to find ultimate, perfect, loving, redemptive, promise-in-the-middle-of-pain, eternal meaning. And our only response when we find it is to worship.

**Practice**

Since worship is the way we live our lives—every day and not just Sunday—we practice it every waking moment. Here’s a reminder of how we can get started.

*Worship means living toward whatever we value most.*

1. Do you value God more than anything else? How can you tell? Would others be able to say that about you?

2. Take a moment this week to look at how you spend your
time and energy. Consider what your choices say about what you value. Decide if you’d like to make any changes to your schedule or habits or lifestyle in order to place more value on God.

*God intends for you to worship expressively, truthfully, and in community.*

↑ Are you part of a church body? Do you make the Bible a regular part of your life? Are you willing to let your hair down and worship with passion and expression?

↑ Thank someone in your church body for inspiring you or teaching you. Keep a Bible on the front seat of your car, and read *one* verse whenever you park your car. List some worship practices that part of you wishes you could do, such as raising your hands or dancing or singing at the top of your lungs.

*Unshakable joy is the outcome of true worship.*

↑ Is your happiness dependent on your circumstances, or do you have a joy grounded in the truth of who God is, what God has done, and what God has promised?

↑ Thank God for being at your side during the most painful times of your life. Pray for a friend or family member who is walking through “the valley of the shadow of death.”

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11 Psalm 23:4, ESV.

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