



EATS WITH SINNERS

Reaching Hungry People Like Jesus Did

ARRON CHAMBERS



If your heart beats passionately for people who have wandered far from God, you need to read this book today! In *Eats with Sinners*, Arron Chambers reminds us of the power of love in reaching people for Jesus. He reminds us that love is always the best context through which to share the truth. And he reminds us that there are no lost causes.

MARK BATTERSON

New York Times bestselling author of *The Circle Maker* and lead pastor of National Community Church

I love that each chapter of this book focuses on a character trait that Christians should cultivate. God always wants to do work *in* us before he works *through* us. Let this book help mold your heart as the Spirit changes you—and then he may just use you to change the lives of the people around you.

KYLE IDLEMAN

Bestselling author of *Not a Fan* and *Grace Is Greater*

It's so easy to forget that the people who live on our streets, who we see on the news, who believe differently than we do, whose lifestyles may make us uncomfortable, all bear the holy image of God and carry the same fears, the same loneliness, the same ultimate longings that Christians do. *Eats with Sinners* is a gentle call to emulate a God who, when we were still far off, met us in Christ and brought us home.

ANDREW PETERSON

Singer/songwriter

Arron Chambers's passion and heart for people come through powerfully in *Eats with Sinners*. This is a fantastic resource for all of us to be reminded and challenged by the way of Jesus. Arron points to how we can engage people with the purpose of Jesus in practical and inspiring ways.

JUD WILHITE

Senior pastor of Central Church

Jesus was called a friend of sinners. We are supposed to be friends with sinners. In fact, if you're not close to people who are far from God, you may not be as close to God as you think you are, because God's heart is always with those who are far from him. In *Eats with Sinners*, Arron Chambers will inspire you to get closer to some people who are far from God and love them as Jesus did.

VINCE ANTONUCCI

Lead pastor of Verve Church and author of *God for the Rest of Us*

Thanks for your book. Thanks for your heart. My wife mentioned the other day on the way home from church, "How can *one* book make such an impact on our whole church?"

ALLEN GONZALEZ

Preaching minister at Capital City Christian Church

Our series on *Eats with Sinners* is going great. People are being baptized, joining the church, and reaching the lost. Exciting times! I cannot truly express the impact Arron's book is having on our church. It is changing hearts and changing lives.

JOHN FAULKNER

Director at Northside Christian Academy



EATS WITH SINNERS

Loving Like Jesus

ARRON CHAMBERS

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Eats with Sinners: Loving like Jesus

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Foreword

I remember when I first met Arron Chambers. At the time, I was leading a church that was growing at a fast pace. The increasing attendance, however, didn't compare to the increasing frustration that kept me up at night.

The influx of people was from other churches; very few identified as non-Christian. In my sermons, personal conversations, newsletters, social media updates, and in other ways, I tried to cast a vision of engaging people far from God with the love of God. While some church members grabbed hold of the vision, far more seemed comfortable with not sharing the message of Jesus.

When my disappointment was at its highest, I decided to attend a leadership conference for some encouragement. Between the conference's main sessions, I became acquainted with Arron. After the last session of the day, we grabbed dinner. That evening, in a small restaurant at an Irvine, Texas, hotel, I poured out my heart. While my monologue may have seemed unending to most people, Arron sat patiently across the table and listened. After I was done venting, he conveyed some of the foundational points of this book. Inspired by his insight, wisdom, and passion for all people, I returned to my church with renewed excitement! Even today, I regularly leverage the principles Arron shared to help others love the people Jesus loved. I've had many meals with people, but that dinner is one I won't soon forget.

Before you begin this journey with Arron, let me prepare you

a little. If you consider yourself a Christian, then approach this book with an open mind, a compassionate heart, and a willingness to change your life. Why? Because Arron isn't content with any Christian "doing life as usual" if that involves indifference toward those far from God. He won't allow us to hide behind powerful words or lengthy prayers for people when we do nothing to reach them. And I'm sure you care too much about your loved ones to keep the gospel a secret.

I believe it's almost impossible to read this book and not develop an excitement to introduce people to God.

For those who might not be following Jesus, let me encourage you. It could be that when you first saw the title of this book, you took offense at the word *sinner*. Maybe you've been called a sinner because you don't follow Jesus, or maybe someone you know has been called that. The word *sinner* just sounds bad. I mean, who wouldn't take offense at it? I do!

But that's the point—we're all undeserving sinners in need of God's love. As you turn the pages of this book, you'll be introduced to Jesus in a way that might surprise you. You'll see a Jesus who will eat with anyone, doesn't run from controversy, is anything but traditional, values the marginalized, speaks truth in love, and is willing to do whatever it takes to have a relationship with you!

Thank you, Arron. I'm grateful for that dinner so many years ago where you reminded me that Jesus would indeed share a meal with anyone—even sinners like you and me.

Caleb Kaltenbach

Lead pastor of Discovery Church and author of
Messy Grace and *God of Tomorrow*

A Word Before

Before I start this book, and before you start reading, I need to say two things.

First, I love sinners. We're all sinners. If you are a Christian, you're a sinner saved by grace. That should make you humble as you eat with sinners and share the grace of Jesus. The best appetizer before eating with sinners is a slice of humble pie.

If you are not a Christian, I want you to know that Jesus loves you more than his life itself. The fourth book of the New Testament records that Jesus said, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17). God sent his Son, Jesus, to this world to die on a cross for your sins because he loves you and wants you to spend eternity with him in heaven. I love you too, and I would love to eat with you sometime—if another Christ follower doesn't beat me to it.

Second, I love the church. If you are my brother or sister in Christ, I want you to know right now that I love you, because there may be points in this book where you start to wonder whether I really like the church.

I say some strong things about the church and address issues that may not reflect your experience. If that's the case, I praise God that you're part of one that gets it. Just know that there are also some well-intentioned believers who don't get it and need a not-so-subtle reminder that our work is not done.

Here's the bottom line:

I love Jesus.

I love you.

Jesus loves lost people.

He wants us to love lost people, too.

Every word of this book was written with love and a hunger for more Christians to eat with sinners.

A friend of mine was visiting his mentor, a retired preacher, in the hospital; his mentor was preparing to say farewell to his wife of more than fifty years. As my friend wrestled with finding the right words to bring peace to his mentor in his time of need, his mentor reached out, patted his knee, and said, "It's okay. I haven't been preaching fairy tales all these years."

I'm not preaching fairy tales in this book. I believe what I've written, but—more importantly—I'm living it.

I was called to serve at Journey Christian Church in Greeley, Colorado, in the summer of 2008, shortly before the first edition of this book was released. Upon arriving at

Journey, a church of about three hundred at the time, I began to immediately implement the lessons of this book. By the end of 2009 our average attendance had grown to more than four hundred.

In 2010, I took the church through the thirteen lessons in this book and then another six-week study we called “The Party.”¹ If I hadn’t experienced the results of that Eats with Sinners study myself, it would be hard to believe. It would seem like a fairy tale.

During the nineteen weeks of our first Eats with Sinners church-wide study in 2010,² our average attendance grew by more than 150. As people started introducing their friends, family, and neighbors to Jesus through intentional relationships, we also started to see people give their lives to Christ in droves. After the sermon on week sixteen of that first Eats with Sinners study, I presented the gospel, many people responded, and we baptized 52 people that day. We ended up baptizing 102 people before the end of 2010, and we’ve baptized 632 people in the last six years. Our average weekly attendance has grown to more than 1,000 as of this writing.

Now, I know that it’s not all about numbers, but it *is* all about loving Jesus and loving like him. We celebrate each lost person who finds Jesus through a loving relationship and is now counted among the saved because someone loved them enough to eat with them.

Introduction

Some of My Best Friends Are Lost

To some, *Lost* is a highly addictive TV show from the mid-2000s about the survivors of a plane wreck who found themselves on a deserted island where nothing made sense and they were not alone.

Lost might be a zone where single socks, class rings, your favorite hat, sunglasses, my brother's car keys, glass eyeballs,¹ the Watergate tapes, and my six-toed cat (Sasquatch) dwell while waiting to be found . . . or not.

Lost is how Ming Kuang Chen felt in an elevator in the Bronx. Chen was making a delivery to a high-rise apartment when the elevator he was riding malfunctioned and dropped almost thirty floors, stranding Chen between the third and fourth floors. Chen screamed, pressed the alarm button, and banged on the elevator door—but for three days no one heard his cries for help and no one looked for him.²

Being lost is never fun.

*Being lost and realizing
that no one is looking
for you is even worse.*

Being lost is never fun. Being lost and realizing that no one is looking for you is even worse.

To God, *lost* describes people who are not where they are supposed to be; *found* describes people who are exactly where they are supposed to be—with him, in Jesus. “There is now no condemnation for those who are *in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:1, emphasis added). God prefers that people be found rather than lost, so he sent his Son into this world to find and save them.

Jesus was a magnet for lost people. They were drawn to him because he was drawn to them. The rejected found acceptance, the hurt found healing, the judged found the Judge to be surprisingly nonjudgmental. The Gospel writer Luke penned these words: “The tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’” (Luke 15:1-2). The Pharisees were the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. *Sinners* was a term the Pharisees and teachers of God’s law used to identify lawbreakers—people they considered social pariahs and so morally filthy they had to be avoided at all costs. *Sinners* was a term the Pharisees used to justify marginalizing people whose behavior they found reprehensible, to identify people they viewed as beyond the hopes of salvation. I’ve found it’s almost impossible to love someone you’ve labeled. That being said, *sinners* was a term the Pharisees used to label people they didn’t want to have to love or feel guilty for not loving.

There are not degrees of true love.

Jesus truly loved sinners, so he ate with them.

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Jesus ate with people the Pharisees crossed the road to avoid.

Jesus ate with people we cross the street to avoid.

Why? He truly loved people, even though he didn't like their sin.

There are not degrees of sin.

We're all sinners (Romans 3:23).

Sinners was a term Jesus used to identify people who have missed the mark, and we've all missed the mark—in the past, now, and every second of our lives this side of heaven. Yet Jesus still eats with us here on earth because he wants to eat with us for all eternity.

So, ironically, the Pharisees were right about Jesus: He *was* welcoming sinners and eating with them. He was eating with sinners even when he was eating with Pharisees. You eat with a sinner every time you eat with me, and I eat with a sinner every time I eat with you. The Pharisees missed the mark by missing the point that we're all in need of salvation. We miss the mark when we forget the same thing.

Let me pause here and make an important point: As I mentioned earlier, the methods in this book work. I've used them over the years to reach many people for Christ. Eating with sinners, or building intentional relationships with lost people through which they can be introduced to Jesus, is the most effective way I know to reach people for Christ. But I also want you to know that I have to be very intentional about interacting with lost people, because for many years, as a preacher at a Christian church, I became insulated and isolated from lost people.

It wasn't always like that. I used to be immersed in a world of lost people. I rode my Big Wheel with them. I sat next to them in school. In the cafeteria, I traded my last piece of Bazooka bubble gum for their chocolate milk. We played soccer together, went to see *Footloose* together, skated all-skates together at Sun State skating rink, danced to "Rock Lobster" together, laughed together, took driver's ed together, went to Just Say No to Drugs assemblies together, took the SAT together, graduated together, and waited tables together. But eventually my encounters with lost people became fewer and further apart.

Today, because of the lessons I learned from Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, I am very intentional about building relationships with lost people. Because of what I've learned about the power and importance of eating with sinners, I am in a very different place and very different places.

I sold my weight set and joined a local gym instead of adding to my home gym.

I seek out opportunities to get involved with the local government to work on community projects. My family and I partnered with our community to build a \$1.3 million universally accessible playground called Aven's Village.³

For the past few years, on my days off and most evenings throughout the year, I coach track, cross-country, and basketball at a local public high school, Frontier Academy. Coaching allows me to build relationships with a lot of great people in our community.

It's through coaching that I met a young man named Joel. Joel's father has never been in the picture but showed up just

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before his graduation with an armful of gifts. After practice one day Joel was talking with me about his dad and said through tears, “I don’t want his stuff! I just want him not to leave!”

I’ve been praying for Joel, an avowed atheist, for more than two years and spent countless hours with him at practice and meets. I love this young man. His dad disappeared again after Joel’s graduation, so my wife and I invited him to spend Father’s Day with us. He came to church that day and ate lunch with us. It was great to worship with Joel, eat with him, and get to know him even better.

I didn’t see or hear from Joel again until a few weeks ago. I was working late at the church when someone told me that a young man was asking to see me. I’m typically not there that late, but I now know that God had arranged a divine appointment. Joel was looking for me and just wanted to talk, so I invited him to my office and we spent a couple of hours together. He’s lost, confused, hurting, and broken. He trusts me because I’ve coached him almost every day for more than two years. He knows I love him, so when he asked me to explain how he could have the hope I have, I had the chance to present the gospel to him and introduce him to Jesus.

I wouldn’t trade that conversation with Joel for anything.

I am very passionate about building intentional relationships with lost people so I can introduce them to Jesus Christ, so I’m very intentional with my time. I’m intentional about spending time with other Christians (Hebrews 10:25), but I’m also intentional about spending time being salt and light around lost people in my world (Matthew 5:13-15).

JESUS ATE WITH LOST PEOPLE

As religious leaders, the Pharisees were committed to the law—and that should have been reflected in a deeper commitment to God and his people. But it wasn't. Instead, their commitment to God resulted in neglect of the weak, poor, and needy.

Once, a Pharisee invited Jesus home for a meal, so Jesus went to the Pharisee's house and ate with him. The Pharisee noticed that Jesus didn't wash his hands before the meal. This surprised him, and he asked Jesus about it. Jesus—struck by the irony of the situation—seized an opportunity to teach

The heart is the heart of the matter. God designed our hearts to beat for others.

this man and his guests an important lesson on the true application of God's law (Luke 11:37-54).

Jesus pointed out that although someone eating with dirty hands upset the Pharisees—and this one in particular—they seemed indifferent about serving God with a dirty heart. They cleaned the outside of the cup but neglected the greed and wickedness filling the inside. Referring to the Pharisees' hearts, Jesus said, "You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But . . . be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you" (Luke 11:40-41).

The heart is the heart of the matter. God designed our hearts to beat for other people: lost *and* found, easy to love *and* hard to love, rich *and* poor, and those with clean hands *and* those with dirty hands. Jesus was teaching this Pharisee that God made our insides to love *all* people—including

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“outsiders.” Jesus lambasted the Pharisees and the experts in the law for giving their hearts to their perverted interpretation of the law of God but not to the maker of the law and the people for whom the law was written. True commitment to God does not result in legalism, but love; not harm, but help; not pride, but humility; not judgment, but mercy; not isolation, but interaction; not rules over people, but relationships with people. True commitment to God results in lost people being found, because true commitment to God results in lost people being loved.

Jesus eagerly ate with sinners on earth because he longed to eat with them in heaven. Jesus referred to himself as the bridegroom (Luke 5:34-35) putting on a great banquet meal (Luke 14:13-24) that he will one day eat in the Kingdom of Heaven with everyone who accepts his invitation. Jesus’ love for lost people was so great, he was willing not just to eat with sinners but also to die for them on a cross: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). The Pharisees obsessed about ritualistic sacrifices for God, but because of the cross, Christians should be obsessed with loving sacrifices for others, doing whatever it takes to reach lost people with the hopeful message of Jesus.

Doing whatever it takes means that we may need to put to rest the methods we’ve used in the past to communicate with lost people. Some of our presentations of the gospel—from pulpits, from the pages of our literature, and from our attempts to share our faith directly—have included an overabundance of yelling, pulpit pounding, finger shaking, foot stomping, and pronouncements that unless people accept a

“loving” Jesus, he will send them to spend eternity in a burning lake of fire where worms don’t die and the wicked weep and gnash their teeth forever.

That’s not the Jesus I see on the pages of my Bible.

I see grace.

I see truth.

I see love.

I see a loving Messiah dispensing hope to lost people, one meal at a time.

EVANGELISM = RELATIONSHIPS

Eating with sinners is not really about eating. Well, it is, but it’s really about relationships. Jesus ate food with people because he wanted to build relationships with them. That’s what has happened at every table around which you’ve spent any amount of time. Every table, given enough time, comes to life, reaches out, and connects those gathered around it with the roots of relationships. This is why I want to eat less often with saints and more often with sinners. I want some of my best friends to be lost—but not for long.

In some of Jesus’ last words to his disciples, he said, “The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47).

You can’t miss the point. There are lost people in “all nations,” and Jesus expects all Christians to go to where those people are wandering, find them, and eat with them.

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I'll discuss this in more detail later, but it's important to point out that eating with someone in the ancient world was much more significant than most of us modern people will ever understand. To eat with someone was a statement of hospitality, acceptance, tolerance, and intimacy. Living with this understanding of mealtime made people in the ancient world much more aware of with whom they chose to eat.

It was one thing for Jesus to welcome sinners, but it was something else altogether for Jesus to eat with them. Jesus shared a table with sinners because he wanted to have a relationship with them.

*I want some of my best friends
to be lost—but not for long.*

Relationships are the key to reaching lost people. I define evangelism as “an intentional relationship through which someone is introduced to Jesus Christ.” Healthy relationships are essential if we want to have the kind of life God intended for all of us, and they are also essential if we want to reach lost people as Jesus did.

In *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today*, an interesting study of how lost people come to faith, Dr. Gary McIntosh reveals the results of a survey of nearly a thousand Christians over a period of ten years. One of the questions he asked was, “How did you come to faith?” His results reveal the power of relationships in reaching lost people with the gospel. According to his research, most people (43.2 percent) come to Christ through a relationship with a family member. Other responses included relationships with a church

staff member (17.3 percent), a friend (15.7 percent), a lay teacher (8.3 percent), a neighbor (2.9 percent), and last by a work colleague (1.8 percent). So according to McIntosh's research, approximately 73.5 percent of those surveyed pointed to a relationship with another Christian as the context through which they were introduced to Jesus. A few years ago the Institute for American Church Growth (today known as Church Growth, Inc.) asked more than ten thousand people, "What or who was responsible for your coming to Christ and your church?"

More than 75 percent responded that a friend or relative had invited them.⁴

The survey proves what you might already suspect: Most people come to a saving faith in Jesus through an intentional relationship. An intentional relationship for a Christian is one in which one person intends to one day have the chance to introduce the other person to Jesus—and then one day *does* introduce him or her to Jesus. And there is no more scriptural model for building relationships with lost people than eating with them.

The word *church* means "called-out ones." Christians are called to be different from all the hazardous influences in the world. Perhaps we have taken that too far, with too many of us deserting the very world Jesus expects us to impact. We are faithful in meeting with other saints regularly around the Lord's Table, but are we faithless in our refusal to meet with lost people around theirs?

This can change. It must change: one relationship at a time, one meal at a time.

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In this book, as we examine Jesus' evangelistic strategy in the Gospel of Luke, we'll see all the ingredients that went into his perfect recipe for reaching lost people. My hope is that, as you embark on practicing the principles that follow, you'll discover the power of eating with sinners and the joy of knowing that some of your best friends have been found.

An intentional relationship for a Christian is one in which one person intends to one day have the chance to introduce the other person to Jesus—and then one day does introduce him or her to Jesus.

1 INTEGRITY

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led
by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days
he was tempted by the devil.*

LUKE 4:1-2



I want you to understand that lacking integrity is our problem, not God's. Like true north, God is a fixed point of reference that never changes and will always be exactly where he's supposed to be.

People, on the other hand, aren't always trustworthy. We're all over the place, so we have to sign contracts, put our right hand on the Bible, pay deposits, and back up our word by saying, "Cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye." (Stick a needle in my eye? Who comes up with this stuff . . . the CIA?)

My friend Gary Mello from Orlando told me a story from his high school days. He worked on a 125-foot scallop

boat, the *Rodman Swift IV*, that sailed out of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Hard and dangerous work, scalloping paid well, and many young men jumped at the chance to fish for scallops in the North Atlantic.

*Like true north, God is
a fixed point of reference
that never changes and
will always be exactly
where he's supposed to be.*

The crew worked long hours, rotating shifts and manning every station during all hours of the day and night.

One evening they put out from New Bedford on an eight-hour trip that would take them past Nantucket to the scalloping grounds in the

Atlantic. Early in the trip Gary was assigned to the wheelhouse and told not to touch anything but to watch the steering compass and make sure the boat stayed on course. The gyro repeater (a steering compass) had been set to a heading of 280 degrees N, so the ship was set to autopilot to its destination. A gyro repeater steers the ship to the coordinates determined and set by the captain. It's a complicated system that works extremely well because of the dependability of the magnetic pull of true north. Gary was simply to make sure that the ship didn't deviate off course.

"No problem," Gary replied, as he took his seat next to the compass and prepared for a long and boring night.

At some point, early in the evening, Gary became thirsty. Knowing he couldn't leave his post, he hollered to his friend Stoney to bring him a canned soft drink. Gary finished his Coke, set it next to the compass, and returned to intermittent glances at the compass and the nautical maps he had secured to figure out where the boat was heading.

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Hours passed, and Gary started to grow concerned because he was sure that he was starting to see land out of the window on the starboard side. The compass still pointed at 280 degrees N, which would be taking them away from land and far out to sea for an early-morning rendezvous with the fishing ground, so he figured he was mistaken and tried to relax. But something didn't feel right.

Eventually his concern grew to the point that he felt compelled to leave his post and tell the captain. Into the damp darkness of the captain's quarters, connected to the wheelhouse, Gary softly whispered, "Cap, I'm not sure we're heading in the right direction."

Half asleep, the captain asked if the compass still pointed to 280 degrees N.

"Yes," Gary replied.

"Then I'm sure we're fine. You're probably just seeing ground fog. Don't worry about it."

With the captain's reassurance, Gary made his way back to his post, convinced that if the captain wasn't worried, then he shouldn't be either.

Several hours passed as the ship steamed toward its early-morning appointment with a multitude of mid-Atlantic scal-

lops. Everything seemed okay until the first light of morning confirmed Gary's worst nightmare. Land!

In a panic, he interrupted the captain's slumber one more time. "Captain," Gary whispered, "I think I'm seeing land."

"It's just ground fog," the captain muttered.

*Integrity is doing the right thing,
even if nobody is watching.*

—UNKNOWN

Convinced that something was amiss, Gary shouted, “No, I’m seeing land!”

“Impossible!” the captain grumbled as he quickly dressed and headed to the wheelhouse, where he verified Gary’s fears. The ship was not heading 280 degrees N, but south down the coast to Long Island, New York!

“Gary, what did you do?”

“Nothing. I just sat here and stared at that compass all night long like you told me to.”

“Did this compass stay on 280 degrees N all night?”

“Yes, sir. And I haven’t left the wheelhouse except to get you.”

The captain reset the compass while he searched for some reason for the deviation. It didn’t take too long to identify the source of the problem. “Gary, is this your can of soda?”

It was.

“The metal in your soda can messed with the magnet in the compass, and it’s caused the whole ship to deviate off course! Do you see what you did?” the captain shouted.

The can had disrupted the magnetic field around the compass, and the *Rodman Swift IV* and her crew went eight hours off course. Gary learned an important lesson about compasses, magnets, navigation, and the ability of a scallop-boat captain to invent new curse words when he is extremely angry. He also learned how easily a ship can be pulled off course by something as simple as a soft-drink can.

If we want to be effective in reaching lost people, we must be people of integrity—fixed points of reference that people can follow to find their way to God. One impurity in our

lives can easily pull us—and the lost people who know us—off course.

Jesus had integrity. Like true north, his life was a fixed point of reference that others could follow to find their way to God.

Understanding the importance of pointing people to God—and his role as the way—Jesus, with hair still damp with the waters of baptism and with the loving words of an approving Father ringing in his ears, followed the Holy Spirit into the desert. For forty days he was tempted by the devil. His mission to find wayward people began with allowing himself to be led away—into the desert—and having his integrity confirmed through testing, testing that was essential to the success of his ministry and the key to his understanding our struggles.

If Jesus had fallen in the desert, there would have been no hope for this fallen world, so it's a good thing that he did the good thing when tempted. In the desert and throughout his life, Jesus was “tempted in

*Oh! Almighty and Everlasting God, Creator of Heaven, Earth and the Universe: Help me to be, to think, to act what is right, because it is right; make me truthful, honest and honorable in all things; make me intellectually honest for the sake of right and honor and without thought of reward to me. Give me the ability to be charitable, forgiving and patient with my fellowmen—help me to understand their motives and their shortcomings—even as Thou understandest mine!
Amen, Amen, Amen.*

—PRESIDENT HARRY TRUMAN'S
PRAYER FOR INTEGRITY

every way, just as we are” (Hebrews 4:15), but he did not sin—an example of both the reality and power of integrity.

I believe that before we can truly help lost people find their way through the desert of temptation and back to the Father, we must, like Jesus, survive our own deserts of temptation—defining moments when we grow into more or shrink into less. Jesus’ ministry to reach lost people began with a defining moment in the wilderness when he had to choose (three times, actually) between right and wrong.

Would he give in to temptation, become just another sinner, and hinder his ministry? Or would he do the right thing? He chose to do the right thing.

If Jesus had fallen in the desert, there would have been no hope for this fallen world, so it's a good thing that he did the good thing when tempted.

Unlike Jesus, we are not perfect. We all sin. But that doesn’t mean we can’t be people of integrity. In the end, for people who aren’t going to die on a cross for

the sins of the world, a life of integrity is not defined by a moment of weakness. We are going to make mistakes, but that doesn’t mean that we can’t be used by God to make a difference, if we’ll only learn from our mistakes and refuse to let them pull our lives off course and away from integrity.

Living a life of integrity is essential if we want to have a truly effective ministry. You can have integrity without a ministry, but you can’t have a ministry without integrity.

This is why God required the high priest, under the old covenant, on the Day of Atonement, to clean himself before entering God’s presence. The high priest was to bathe before

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putting on the sacred garments (Leviticus 16:4) and to deal with his own sins before dealing with the sins of the people. Before he shed one drop of animal blood to atone for someone else's sin, the high priest had to shed the blood of a bull for his own sin and the sin of his household (Leviticus 16:6, 11).

I think God required that the high priest make his first act of ministry to himself and his household because our personal and private holiness should be our priority. If we aren't walking with integrity privately before God, we can't truly walk with integrity publicly for God. God values a good heart more than a good performance. God values sincere private integrity more than a hypocritical public ministry. God is the definition of integrity, and the priest was God's representative to the people, so it was essential for him to be godly and to have integrity—not faultless, but false-less.

This is why God wants us, his priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10), to be people of integrity before we begin our ministry to lost people.

It's the purpose behind the whole log-in-the-eye story that Jesus told in his most well-known sermon. Trying to teach us the importance of dealing with our own integrity issues before attempting to help others with theirs, Jesus said,

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? . . . You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

LUKE 6:41-42

What a hilarious picture! What important truths for each of us to remember before we eat the first morsel of food with a lost person!

First, Jesus *does* want us to get specks out of other people's eyes. Don't miss that point.

Second—which really comes first—before we attempt to get *specks* out of other people's eyes, we must first take the *planks* out of our own eyes. Pretty humbling. But Jesus wants our ministries to be characterized by integrity, not hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is cancerous to evangelism, rendering Jesus a joke and his message a punch line in the hearts and minds of lost people.

PERSONAL INTEGRITY PRODUCES AUTHENTICITY, NOT HYPOCRISY

I believe it all begins with personal integrity. Our integrity is the foundation upon which God can build a significant life and ministry. Without personal integrity, our lives will ultimately come crashing down. Without personal integrity, our public ministry is inauthentic and ultimately hypocritical. Let me say it another way: Authenticity is what integrity wears when it goes out in public. A familiar story may help you to see what I'm saying here.

One of my favorite Hans Christian Andersen fables describes an emperor who is arguably the most famous hypocrite of all time. The emperor loved new clothes. One day two swindlers came to his city and made people believe they were weavers who could manufacture the finest cloth

imaginable—but the quality of the cloth was so high, the clothes would be invisible to anyone who was not very discerning or was unpardonably stupid. These charlatans worked hard but made nothing.

When the emperor was shown his “new outfit,” he acted impressed even though he saw nothing, and he agreed to wear the outfit in a parade through his kingdom. As he marched through the streets, everyone who saw him cried out, “Indeed, the emperor’s new suit is incomparable! What a wonderful suit!” The people didn’t want others to know they saw nothing. The universal praise continued until the emperor passed by a little child who cried out, “The emperor’s not wearing any clothes!”

At this, everyone in the kingdom acknowledged the same fact and joined the child in proclaiming, “The emperor’s not wearing any clothes!” The charade was over.

Our charade must end too.

Just as sure as that delusional emperor was buck naked and needed to admit it, you and I are sinners who need to get authentic and admit both our tendency to sin and our need of salvation. We’re all sinners who fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Let’s be authentic and admit it.

PERSONAL INTEGRITY PRODUCES COURAGE, NOT FEAR

Integrity doesn’t just manifest itself in authenticity; it also manifests itself in courage.

Telemachus was a man of integrity who faced his fears and

in so doing saved lives and pointed lost people to God. The story is told of how Telemachus followed the crowds to the Colosseum in Rome and watched sadly as two gladiators fought to the death. Telemachus tried to get between them, shouting, “In the name of Christ, stop!” Enraged that this man was interrupting their entertainment, the crowd stoned Telemachus. When the people came to their senses and saw the monk lying dead in a pool of blood, they fell silent and left the stadium. According to tradition, because of Telemachus’s death, three

You and I are sinners who need to get authentic and admit both our tendency to sin and our need of salvation.

days later the emperor ended the practice of gladiators fighting to the death.¹

“The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion” (Proverbs

28:1). Telemachus was as bold as a lion, and we should be too.

To reach this world with the saving message of Jesus Christ, we’re going to have to be courageous—and we will be, if we are also righteous.

Sin makes cowards of us all.

A father who smoked pot in college may be afraid to tell his son to say no to drugs.

A mother who slept with other men before marriage may feel intimidated about trying to persuade her eighteen-year-old daughter to save herself for marriage.

The pastor who struggles with an addiction to pornography may find it impossible to preach against the very monster that privately stalks him late at night while his family sleeps upstairs.

Discovery of Truth

I met Jeff when I moved to Florida. We both worked at Home Depot and enjoyed surfing. One Saturday I asked Jeff if he wanted to go surfing the next day. He mentioned that he was going to church. I didn't know at the time that he was a Bible college student and a committed Christian. I was interested in going to church, since I was a thousand miles from home and lonely.

I didn't go to church with Jeff the next day, but a seed was planted. Over the next few months, Jeff and I had many talks about life. He was a frank and to-the-point kind of guy. He never seemed to hesitate to say what I needed to hear to challenge my way of thinking.

Jeff was a man of integrity, and I grew to respect him. Jeff led me to Christ and helped me get plugged in with the church, and I eventually went to Bible college, where I continued to grow in my faith. And to think it all started when I asked a coworker to go surfing.

—SHAWN—

Private sin is an evil warden that Satan employs to keep us locked up, silent, and hopeless in a dungeon that reeks with fear. But private sin is also an illusion. We can't fool God.

God searches our hearts (1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 7:9; Romans 8:27; Revelation 2:23) and knows the sins we struggle with. He stands ready to “forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). His forgiveness, and his forgiveness alone, makes us righteous—people with integrity who should be courageous in the face of sin and sinners.

PERSONAL INTEGRITY PRODUCES FAITHFULNESS, NOT PERFECTION

Men and women with integrity are unstoppable. You can be unstoppable. When Nehemiah needed someone to make sure the gates in the newly rebuilt walls around Jerusalem were not opened until the right time, he called on a man named Hananiah, “because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do” (Nehemiah 7:2).

When Satan wanted a man to prove human frailty, God offered him a man of integrity who would be faithful to the end, saying, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 2:3).

These men were faithful—not perfect.

Think about King David, the man who slept with a woman who was not his wife (Bathsheba) and then had her husband killed in battle. The apostle Paul reminds us of what God thought about David: “I have found David son of Jesse, a man

after my own heart” (Acts 13:22). God said this not because David was perfect, but because David was faithful (Hebrews 11:32-33). Yes, David was a sinner, but he didn’t allow himself to be defined by sin. He was a man who, when confronted about his sin by the prophet Nathan, admitted he was a sinner (2 Samuel 12:13) and took significant steps to mend his character. David’s life was not defined by a moment of weakness.

God told Solomon, David’s son, to follow his dad’s example: “If you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness,

as David your father did,
 . . . I will establish your
 royal throne over Israel forever” (1 Kings 9:4-5). God wanted Solomon to look at

*When Satan wanted a man to
 prove human frailty, God offered
 him a man of integrity who would
 be faithful to the end.*

his father’s life as a point of reference—not because David was perfect, but because he was faithful. And David was faithful because he had integrity. God wants us to be people of integrity.

Why does God call us to be people of integrity? First, for our own good. And second, he doesn’t want our lives to pull off course the lives of the lost people who are following us.

Delmar, who used to be an elder at Journey Christian Church before his death, was a man of integrity. Delmar led a Saturday morning Bible study at a local bar called The Fort (which I’ll discuss more in chapter 5). Since Delmar walked with integrity, he was able to walk into the world and lives of all kinds of people. His integrity gave him the opportunity to reach people with the gospel in a place where they feel comfortable.

He reached a lot of people for Jesus because his life was a fixed point that the people at The Fort could follow straight to Jesus.

Those people at The Fort didn't realize it, but they needed Delmar to be a man of integrity. They need us to be people of integrity: fixed points of reference they can follow to find themselves not lost—not heading south to Long Island, not even heading 280 degrees N—but heading back to where they were supposed to be all the time.

WALKING WITH INTEGRITY

- Invest in personal devotions. Get your Bible, find a quiet place, and start reading the book of Luke. After reading for a while, stop and spend some time in prayer. Ask God to help you identify the areas in your life that are not as pure as they should be.
- Find an accountability partner. I meet with other Christians every week for the sole purpose of ensuring that I'm growing in my faith and living the kind of life I should be living. Find a Christian of the same gender with whom you can meet regularly and by whom you can be held accountable for living a life of integrity.
- Get involved with a local church. Are you regularly meeting with a local church? If not, it's time to get involved with one. This will put you in fellowship with other Christians and in a place where you will be exposed to biblical teaching—both of which will help you to live a life of integrity.

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