



my name is

ERIN

One Girl's Journey to
Discover Who She Is

Erin Davis

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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My name is Erin. That's me about the time my bangs hit their peak, circa seventh grade.

I have a serious aversion to shopping malls, I'm not a huge fan of pink, and my hair has been in a messy ponytail for 364 of the last 365 days. (I just cannot get the hang of flat irons, curling irons, or hairspray!) I spend a lot more time being loud and rowdy than I do being "gentle and quiet." My fingernails haven't been painted since my wedding, more than a decade ago. Don't get me wrong: I love being a girl. But if you're searching for the poster child for girly girlness, I'm afraid you'll need to keep looking.

I suppose that makes me a strange choice to write a book on God's Truth about being a girl.

I mean, don't the women in the Bible love to cook and clean and wear flowing skirts in fields of flowers? Not exactly. At least, not all of them. In fact, as we look to the Bible for answers about what it means to be a girl, we will find women who were feisty,



strong, and brave, as well as some women who used their gentle femininity for God's glory. From clever heroines to bold military leaders, these ladies can join me in the "We're Not Girly Girls" Club. I'll go ahead and sign you up for your free membership too, because whether you're a mega tomboy, a pretty-pretty princess, or someone somewhere in between, God has a plan for your girlhood that goes way beyond ribbons and curls.

Before we can get to the "what" of God's plan for us as girls we need to answer "why?" Why does it matter that God created men and women? Why did God make guys and girls so different? Why does gender (that's just a fancy word for the traits that make girls *girls* and boys *boys*) matter anyway?

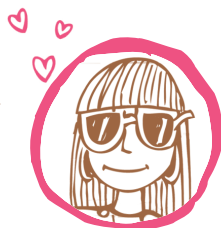
Yep, you're a girl, but how does that fit into who you are as a daughter, sister, student, friend, athlete, dreamer, or future rock star? How does it impact how you live out your faith?

Great questions! I'm glad you asked.

I don't have it all figured out and I can't promise to answer every question about gender within the pages of this book, but I do know what it's like to wonder, "What kind of girl does God want me to be?" That question sent me running to the Bible for answers. What I found made me so excited to be a girl.

A New Pair of Glasses

I've seen what can happen when we let the world tell us what gender means. It isn't pretty! I've counseled many girls who feel like the rope in a tug of war because they're torn between the messages of the culture and what they think a good, Christian girl should want to be like. I've



been the girl who wondered if I could ever measure up to the women in the Bible without having a total personality transplant.

If you read the first book in this series, *My Name Is Erin: One Girl's Journey to Discover Truth*, you know that I've learned God's Word is like a pair of glasses that can change how we see the world. His Truth has certainly changed how I see gender. But it's not my mission to tell you how you should think about what it means to be a girl. Instead, I want to show you how to discover God's Truth for yourself.

My name is Erin, and this is my story.



A world without Pink and Blue



Here are a few of the ways gender has made headlines recently.

★ A Toronto couple made international news by refusing to announce the gender of their baby even to his/her own grandparents. Baby Storm's family decided to allow their child to define his/her own gender and vowed never to share what was under his/her diaper even with close family members.¹

★ For the first time ever, the United States Navy decided to allow two women to share the traditional homecoming kiss upon the return of a Navy vessel.²

★ Several preschools made the news by banning all mentions of gender among even the youngest of students. Such schools


have banned words like “him,” “her,” “he,” and “she,” and have invented new words to take their place.³



These stories got people talking. To be honest, they got folks fighting plenty too. Some people think we should simply erase gender from the world. No more blue is for boys and pink is for girls. Instead we should live in a genderless society where all the lines are blurred. Others think traditional gender lines must be protected or chaos will ensue. And there are plenty of people somewhere in the middle asking, “Why should I care about gender?”

what's the Big Deal?

I can see why the young women in my world struggle to understand what it means to be a girl.

Every day I meet girls who do not know who God has made them to be or how God has called them to live. The consequences are devastating. Here are a few statements I've heard from girls recently:

 “Every girl wants a real nice relationship and to be taken care of and to be loved . . . Since girls want this, why wouldn't I want to be in a romantic relationship with a girl because I want this too! All boys want is trouble.”


Catch up with Erin in
the blogosphere at
liesyoungwomenbelieve.com.




"I've been struggling with this question for quite a few weeks now . . . What's the purpose of marriage? That may seem like a dumb question, but God doesn't want our devotion and love to be divided. Isn't that exactly what happens when you marry and eventually have kids?"



"I think we hold up this Proverbs 31 woman way too high on some pedestal, and the end result is a lot of frustration, guilt, and shame because we as women can never measure up. I hate to say it, but women need to stop living in her shadow. We are not created to serve or be slaves to men."

These girls don't understand that the differences between guys and girls are a good thing! Because they don't understand the way God wired boys, they assume that boys only want trouble. Because they don't understand the roles girls are designed for, they struggle to find purpose. Because they don't know the reasons God made



Proverbs 31 is a passage that describes a version of Superwoman. She's a wife, mom, seamstress, chef, real estate tycoon, and fashionista. Many Christians hold her up as the "perfect woman." This passage was actually written as a description of a good woman by a mother to her son (Proverbs 31:1), not as an actual billboard for what we should all look like.

gender in the first place, they have a hard time making sense of their relationships, their feelings, and their future.

They are not alone. This is a great place for me to introduce a group of girls I just know you'll love. I really wanted to get into the minds of the readers of this book. I'm a little older than you (ahem, maybe a lot older!), and I would never assume to have you all figured out. So some friends and I hit the road to hang out

with young women across the country and get their take on what it means to be a girl. The girls we talked to were probably a lot like your group of friends. They were mostly Christians (many were raised in church), but like me they had big questions about what kind of girl God wants them to be. You'll hear their take on gender throughout this book.



These girls love to talk! That's why I like to call them the **Gab Gallery**. From here on out, I'll just call them "the Gallery." It's their job to make you feel that you are a part of a conversation about what it means to be a girl (because you are!). If you love to talk, you'll fit right in.



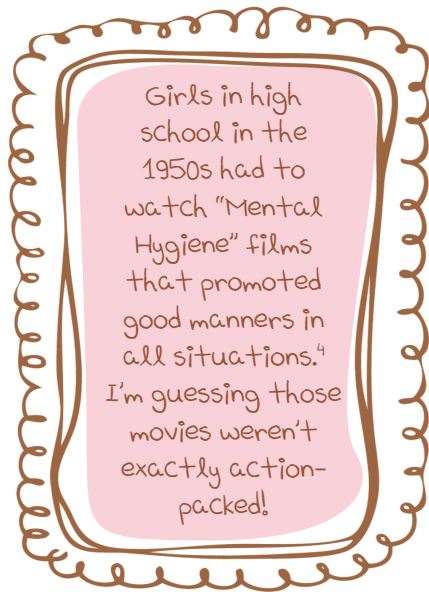
If the Gallery were teaching Girlhood 101, here's a peek into their lesson plans.

★ “I do not like it when I am called ‘a young woman’ . . . I’m not in to that whole etiquette thing.”

★ “Women stay home . . . sometimes, and men go to work and pay the bills. Sometimes women work, but mostly men work and mow the lawn. Except at my house.”

★ “Guys are easier; they are more fun. Girls make such a big deal about things!”

There’s nothing exactly wrong with the way the Gallery was trying to define the differences between girls and guys, but their ideas were kind of all-over-the-map. One girl said she didn’t like the whole “etiquette thing” (she later told us she did not like to be called a “lady.” Noted!). Rewind to the 1950s when having good manners



was a huge part of being a girl. Can a modern girl resist all that lady talk and still be feminine? Still be girly?

Another girl said women stay home while men work and mow the lawn. That throws us back to some very traditional gender roles that may leave you feeling like you're being pulled into an episode of *Leave It to Beaver*. But even she admitted that wasn't how things really worked at her own house. Maybe there is no normal. Should there be?



That last girl painted guys and girls with a really wide brush. Guys are easy and fun; girls are dramatic. I'm guessing she has some girl drama in her life! Are guys really just cavemen who think simple thoughts and like to have fun? And are all girls drama queens? Did God make us to be that way?

My goodness! If we think of studying God's plan for being a girl like unraveling a knot of mixed messages, we seem to be tying the knot more tightly by stirring up more questions than answers. As I listen to what the Gallery is saying and line it up with my own heart, it becomes very clear that most of us are fairly confused about what it means to be a girl.



Hop into the wayback Machine

How did we get here? Let's have a brief history lesson. (Don't worry, there won't be a quiz.)

In the 1950s being a girl meant dresses and dreams of a future dream house, complete with white picket fence, where your 2.5 children could play.⁵

In the 1960s a movement called “feminism” caught fire in America. (Speaking of catching fire, this is an era when women burned their bras in the name of change. Weird!) Women were supposed to be strong, loud, and take-charge. They ditched feminine touches like dresses, pink, and frills as they marched.⁶ In the 1980s girls just wanted to have fun, at least that’s what pop singer Cyndi Lauper told us. There are plenty of fashion trends from the eighties that are simply too gaudy to mention here (I’m talking to you, shoulder pads!), but one trend worth noting is power dressing. Women in the workforce were the norm in the eighties, and they wanted to show they were equal to (or better than) their male coworkers. So women rocked suits and big hair with the occasional touch of blue eye shadow.⁷ An eighties girl had her sights set on a corner office. I was in junior high and high school in the nineties. The clearest message I heard was that anything guys could do, I could do better. I also learned to put all my hopes for a happy life into the basket of an important career. At the dawn of the new millennium, I had it all: high-paced career, fancy degrees in frames on the wall, and a hubby who was happy to let me run the show. But it didn’t feel like the fairy tale I was promised it would be. I couldn’t shake my craving for more.



It didn't
feel like the
fairy tale
I was
promised it
would be!



If we look at history like a map, the girls of past decades point us to the spot that says, “You are here.” What does it mean to be a girl right now?

Is a modern girl powerful or soft? Does she want a career or a family? Does she deserve to be taken care of or want to be in charge? How can we look beyond the messages of the fashion industry and pop singers and figure out what God would say if He were teaching *Girlhood 101*?

It is possible to know God’s plan for gender, but before we get there let’s pull out our magnifying glasses and look just a little closer at what’s on the line.

Here is what researchers are saying about you:

- ★ For the first time ever, more of you are saying “I don’t” to the idea of marriage.
- ★ Living with a guy you’re not married to is okay with you.⁸
- ★ For the first time ever, women are earning the majority of college degrees. You want to finish your education. You want a career. And you want at least as much responsibility in your job as the guys you know.⁹
- ★ Most of you aren’t sure if motherhood is for you, or you want to delay it until after you’ve accomplished your career goals.
- ★ If you become moms, you don’t feel pressure to work less to raise kids. You want to have it all.¹⁰

★ Some researchers have said that marriage and family are still important goals for girls your age, but you're not sure if and why it matters.¹¹ (Hint: it does!)

Some of you may read that list and think, "That sounds about right." Others may look at that list and think, "No way! That's not how I think."

What? Some of you may be straddling the fence. No matter where you land, lean in and listen closely. It's less important for us to figure out exactly what we think about being a girl and more important for us to ask God to show us His heart for gender.

The bottom line is that we cannot simply erase gender from our lives. We cannot delete words like "he" and "she" from our vocabulary without new words with the same meaning creeping into our conversations. Nope, boys and girls are here to stay, and so are our differences. Our best bet is to seek to understand those differences through the lens of God's Truth!

which brings me to the
first girl who ever lived





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My name is Erin. There's a part of me that would love to stretch the truth and tell you that I'm just like you, that I wear stylish clothes, that I listen to the bands you like, and that I love hanging out at the mall. But . . . that's not exactly true. Most of my wardrobe comes from Target, I drive a minivan without a stereo, and I only go to the mall if I am having a chunky jewelry emergency (because a girl simply cannot have too many plastic jewels).

Since this book is all about truth, perhaps the best place to start is the truth about who I am. I'm thirtyish. (I know that sounds old, but someday it won't.) I live in the Midwest with my handsome man, my adorable kids, and my blond Goldendoodle. I'm a Milk Duds fanatic, a drinker of sweet tea and fine milkshakes, and a sucker for movies that end with a wedding.



I'm also a huge fan of girls just like you. You're fun and open and loyal. My favorite thing about you is that you can smell a fake (person . . . story . . . handbag) from a mile away, but you love it when you find something that's real. That's why I am so passionate about pointing you toward God's Truth.



I may not be playing dodgeball with you in gym class. I might not look like the girls who sit with you at lunch, but believe it or not, I've walked a mile (or two) in your shoes. I know what it's like to want answers to big questions about God, the Bible, and Truth. I remember feeling like I was in a tug of war between what others believed and what I read in the Bible and wondering often, "How do I know which way is right?"

My journey to discover Truth has been a long and bumpy ride, but the good news is, I've found it. (Spoiler alert: It was in the Bible all along!) Here's more good news: God's Truth is *yours* for the taking. You can know the Truth, and that knowing has the power to change everything about your life.

I've had a front row seat to watch what can happen when one girl understands and decides to live by God's Truth. I want my journey to discover Truth to help point you in the right direction. But I'm not interested in teaching you what to think. Instead I want to show you how to discover Truth for yourself.

My name is Erin, and this is my story. ♡ ♡
♡

The Ship Is Sinking!

I know we just met, but if you don't mind, I'd like to take you on a little cruise. Since this is a book for girls, let's imagine it's a girls-only cruise, to the Caribbean of course! The sun is shining, the water is crystal clear, and we all look fabulous in our bathing suits (Hallelujah!). I will be your captain on this lovely voyage. True, I've never sailed a ship in my life, but since this is an imaginary cruise, I think you should be safe.

Our ship is sailing along at 28 knots (I Googled boating terms in order to sound official) when things take a turn of Titanic proportions. Maybe we hit an iceberg. Maybe it was a flock of seagulls. Maybe I got totally



I have a friend who used to tease her hair with a toothbrush. Now that's distracting!

distracted by a girl with better hair than mine . . . in any case, our boat has a hole in it and we are taking on water. In my defense, I did warn you that I had never sailed a ship before.

I sound the alarm that we are going down, but you just stay in your lounge chairs. I grab the life rafts and get them ready, but no one moves. The water is up to your ankles, but you make no plans to abandon ship. “We are sinking!” I yell. “As your captain, I command you to get in a life raft!”



“It doesn’t really *feel* like we are sinking, so I don’t believe that we really are sinking,” one girl says. “If it feels like we are sinking later, I might believe you.”

“I’ve never been a crowd follower,” says another. “Just because some of you think this boat is sinking and want to jump in a life preserver, doesn’t mean that’s the right choice for me. I’m staying put.”

“I’ll join you on the life raft,” says one girl, “but I don’t want to offend any other girls by asking them to come too. If they don’t believe this boat is sinking, who am I to tell them differently?”

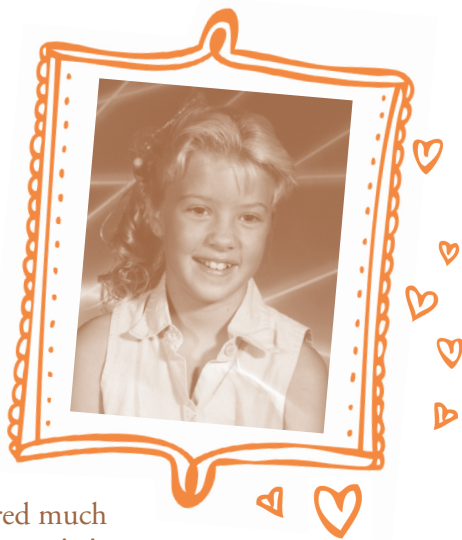
With the water up to our waists, we have no choice but to jump in the life raft and abandon our wounded ship. The two of us push off and watch helplessly as the ship goes down with a deck full of our friends on board.

True, this is an unlikely scenario. The readers of this book will never gather for a girls-only cruise (bummer), and I promise never to volunteer to captain a ship with cute hair on board. But, imagining us oblivious to a real and present danger isn't as unlikely as you might think. Because the ship *is* sinking.

why Truth?

True confession: I was voted the “Most Conceited” member of my seventh-grade class. I have the yearbook picture to prove it. In junior high my world pretty much revolved around M-E. I was all wrapped up in my appearance, my friends, my plans, and what I thought passed for fashion. (See awkward Erin photo.)

If someone would have asked me why Truth mattered during those years, I would have said something like, “I don't know. How's my hair?” I might not have cared much about Truth then, but looking back I see I was missing out on something with the power to reprogram my entire mental computer.



The key question this book asks is “Why Truth?” Notice I’m not asking, “What is truth?”—at least not yet. Defining Truth matters, and with God’s Word as our guide, we will do it together within the chapters of this book. But before we can get to the *what* we need to answer the *why*. *Why* does Truth matter? *Why* should you believe the Bible? *Why* should you risk swimming upstream by living as if God’s Truth matters in a culture that says anything goes?

These are complex questions and finding the answers will require some brainpower from all of us. But don’t let that scare you, we may not be on a girls-only cruise, but in the search for truth, we are all in this together.

To clarify, I’m not exactly talking about telling the truth here—as in ’fessing up when you’ve done something wrong. I’m more interested in truth with a capital *T*. What is true about our world? What is true about what is right and wrong? What is true about what matters?



Truths and a Lie about Erin

Guess which one of these statements is not true:



Erin once got in trouble with the Secret Service.



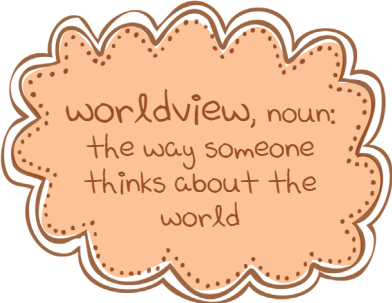
Erin holds a Guinness Book world record.



Erin once threw up on Elvis’s grave.

(ANSWER: 2)

I'm talking about more than just whether it's true that the sky is blue and the grass is green. I'm interested in what you know *for sure* about the world you can and cannot see. In other words, what's your worldview?



worldview, noun:
the way someone
thinks about the
world

We can also think of worldview as the filter through which we view life. Some of us may be seeing the world through rose-colored glasses. Some of us are watching through bifocals. Some of us are seeing the world in those funny 3-D shades! The world stays the same, but we are essentially viewing it through a different filter. With that bigger definition in mind, I'd love to hear from you. How do you define Truth? Go ahead; write your answer

right there in your book (if it's a library book, better use invisible spy ink!).



 Truth is _____

If you struggled to define Truth, that's okay. Because Truth is a big concept, it can be difficult to wrap our brains around. Allow me to introduce some girls who might be able to help. In order to get into the minds of the girls who might be reading this book, my friends and I conducted focus groups all over the country with girls just like you. The one thing all of these girls had in common is that they loved to talk. So

I refer to them as the **Gab Gallery**. You'll hear their stories throughout this book, and I bet they sound a lot like you and your closest friends. It's their job to make you feel like you are a part of a conversation about Truth. (Because you are!) If you love to talk, you'll fit right in.

One of the first questions we asked was, **"What is Truth?"**

Here are some of the actual answers from the Gallery:

- ★ "Real stuff"
- ★ "To be yourself"
- ★ "Truth is what you believe about yourself, what you want to be . . . Who you are, that's your truth."



How to make invisible spy ink

1. Mix 1/4 cup of baking soda and 1/4 cup of water.
2. On a standard piece of paper write secret words with a Q-tip or small brush.
3. Let dry completely.
4. To read the secret message, paint grape juice concentrate across the paper with a paintbrush or sponge.
5. Warning: Grape juice stains!
6. Impress others with your sneaky spy skills!



Those aren't bad answers, but they're kind of . . . um . . . *squishy*. If Truth is defined by what's real, then where does God fit into the equation? He may be real to you, but not to your neighbor or best friend. Does that kick Him out of the race to define Truth? And if Truth hinges on *you*, and you are free to believe whatever Truth you feel about who you are, then what happens when your feelings don't match the facts? You may *feel* like you don't have any friends, but does that make it true? See what I mean? Squishy.

So if we can't come at Truth directly, let's try the back door. Perhaps if we know what is *not* true, we can wrap our minds around what is true. Ready to jiggle the lock with me and see if we can find another way in to understanding what Truth is?



If a Girl Had Ten Friends . . .

If numbers give you a headache, first let me ask you to be my best friend! I don't do numbers, just ask my math teachers from kindergarten through college. But I am interested in facts, and sometimes numbers can help us see the facts a little more clearly. So I'm going to throw some numbers at you here, but don't let your eyes glaze over. I think they will help us see why Truth matters so much. If you happen to be the kind of girl who digs numbers, you're gonna love this (and I suppose we can still be friends).

Barna Research Group (number geeks) conducted a series of surveys designed to study what we believe about absolute truth. Since percentages can be boring (yawn!), I've put them in the context of ten friends. In the margin of this book, I want you to list ten of your friends. (If you can only

come up with nine, feel free to add me as number 10!) Keep that little group in mind as you think through what Barna dug up.

Truth
doesn't
change.

More than eight out of ten teenagers believe moral truth depends on circumstances.¹ Only 6% believe that moral truth is absolute.² Of that group of ten friends, only one half of one girl (don't ask me which half!) would say that truth doesn't change.



And one girl wouldn't even know what moral truth means.



I don't know
how I make
decisions.

Four of your friends would say that they make moral and ethical decisions based on what feels right or comfortable to them.³ Again only one half of one girl would say that she makes moral choices based on biblical principles.⁴ Half of

the group would have no idea how they make decisions.⁵

All
faiths
are the
same.

And, 43% of Americans—teens, parents, grandparents, ALL of us—said it doesn't matter what religious faith you follow because they all teach the same lesson.⁶ If we could gather ten of your friends, ten of my friends, ten of your parents' friends, etc., almost half of each group would say, "Nah, it doesn't

What?

really matter what you believe." And I'm guessing there would be people in every group who didn't know what they believe about what to believe!

I hate to jump to the punch line too quickly, but for Christians these numbers are troubling because they contradict what the Bible says.

John 17:17 says, “Sanctify them in the truth; *your word is truth*” (emphasis added).

When it comes to defining Truth we tend to make things too complicated. Simply put, God’s Word is Truth. When we want to know the Truth, we don’t have to look any further than what is written in the Bible. So let’s use God’s Word as our starting point to break these stats down.



“I believe truth depends on circumstances.”

Our culture trains us to avoid thinking in absolutes.

It feels impossible to think that anything could be true 100% of the time, but that is exactly the claim God makes about His Word. The Bible is chock-full of important and complex truths like *God is omniscient* (all-knowing), *God is the Creator of all things*, and *God has given us guidelines for our good*. The Bible presents these ideas as absolute truths, meaning that that they do not change based on circumstances or feelings.



In other words ...
If you’re not sure
what absolute

means, here are
some other ways to
describe it.

- Complete
- No fine print
- No ifs, ands, or buts
- Straight out
- Supreme
- Final

In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

This verse says *all Scripture* comes from God and is useful for helping us be more like Him. But . . . that was written a long time ago, right? Aren't there parts of the Bible that no longer apply or can change based on what's going on in your life? Great question!

Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man that he should change his mind.”

Hebrews 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

Put those verses together with what we read in 2 Timothy, and it's like taking a sledgehammer to the idea that moral truth depends on what's going on with you personally.

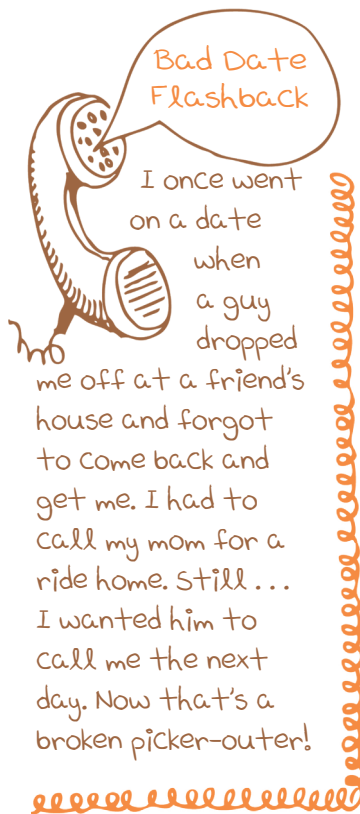
All Scripture is God-breathed + All Scripture applies to our lives + God does not change = Absolute Truth.



“I make decisions based on what feels right.”

When I was in junior high and high school, I had a broken picker-outer. If a boy was going to treat me bad, hurt my feelings, or “forget” to return my calls, he was my kind of guy. I was drawn to guys who were just bad news. My feelings said that they were right for me, and on the rare occasions they actually liked me back, my emotions screamed, “This feels so good, it must be right!” I wasn't the first girl to base my choices about boys strictly on how they make me feel. And, sadly, I won't be the last.





Proverbs 14:12 gives us this strong warning: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in its end is the way to death.”

These words are repeated in Proverbs 16:25. When your parents or teachers repeat themselves, it’s because they want to make sure you don’t miss the point. We can assume that this double warning appears in Scripture for the same reason.

God is saying, “Listen up! Sin might feel right, but it will lead to your destruction. And in case you missed it: Just because it feels good, doesn’t mean you should do it!”

In Hebrews 11:25 we find a reference to Moses that presents the same Truth in a different wrapper.

“... choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the *fleeting pleasures of sin*” (emphasis added).

Go back and circle the word that describes the pleasures of sin. Did you get it? *Fleeting*. As in short-lived, temporary, gone in a blink.

This verse acknowledges that sin can be fun, but that those feelings are fleeting. It’s the same reality Eve faced when she took a bite of the apple

from the tree that was good, delightful, and desirable in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6). It felt right for a moment, but the moment was short-lived.

 "It doesn't really matter what I believe, all religions teach the same thing."

We can punch holes in this statement with a single verse.

In John 14:6, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"



Jesus claimed that He was the only way to God. Other religions may have some teachings similar to Christianity regarding how we should live, but where the rubber meets the road is what they teach about God. It *does* matter what we believe, because Jesus is making a radical claim.

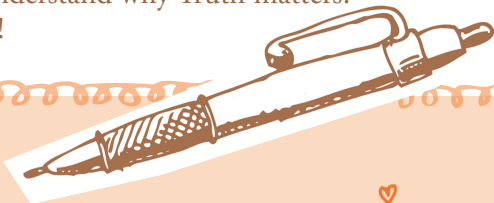
See the problem? The culture says truth can change. God's Word says Truth is solid. Most people make decisions based on what feels right. God's Word says that our gut can't always be trusted. The majority says that all religions teach the same thing. Jesus says He is the only way. In human thinking—and all other religions—we have to earn rewards like heaven or oneness with God. But God's Word offers the only truth that makes oneness with God possible: Jesus paid it all. We don't have to earn it.

If Truth is an iceberg, we've just seen the tip. Remember that we just sucker-punched the idea that all religions are the same. (They may be similar, but they don't teach us that Jesus is the only way!) If we look below the surface, we will find more and more spots where what the culture says and what God's Word says simply don't match up.

The Truth about Truth

These are complicated issues we are trying to unravel here. If thinking about it makes your brain hurt, don't worry. You're in good company. I know that understanding what Truth is and why it matters takes some serious brainpower! Stick with me while I boil it down to one simple choice. Let me help you get those brain muscles flexing. Let's think through what *you* believe about Truth. Here are two lists of opposing views of Truth. I want you to circle the list you think is most true. Don't give me Sunday school answers. I'm less interested in what you think the right answers are and more interested in helping you understand why Truth matters.

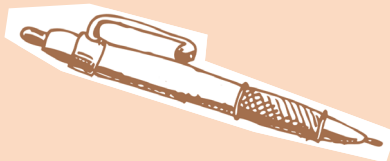
Got your pen? Ready. Set. Circle!



Absolute TRUTH

- ★ Truth is the same no matter where you live.
- ★ Truth doesn't change.
- ★ Just because someone doesn't believe the Truth, that doesn't make it untrue, no matter how sincere the belief.
- ★ I can know Truth. It is not mysterious or unknowable.
- ★ I can discover Truth, but I cannot create it.
- ★ God determines what is True.





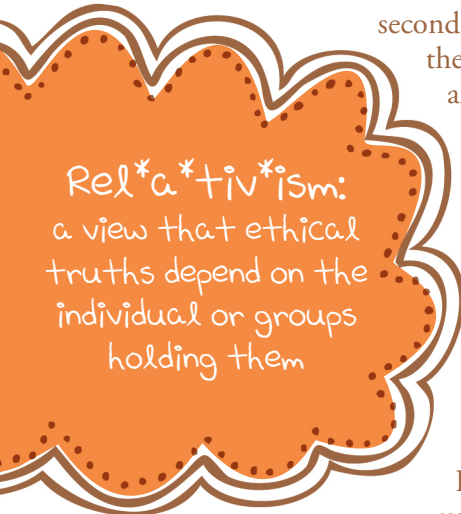
Relative TRUTH

- Truth changes based on culture. What is true for you as an American teenager may not be true for a teenager in a village in Africa.
- Truth can change.
- All people can define for themselves what is Truth based on their experiences.
- Since everyone's perception of Truth is different, it is impossible to know absolute Truth.
- Truth is created not discovered.
- Each individual is free to decide what is true for her.



Remember those girls we interviewed for this book (the Gab Gallery)? These were Christian girls, and many were leaders in their homes and youth groups. They grew up in church. They had a stack of Christian T-shirts. They could talk the talk of being a Christian. (I call that speaking Christianese.)

So . . . which list do you think they most identified with? If you guessed list 2, you get a gold star! Over and over, in city after city, the girls expressed an approach to truth that lined up more closely with the



Rel*a*tiv*ism:
a view that ethical
truths depend on the
individual or groups
holding them

second list. Even though they had been exposed to the Bible, they held to a system of beliefs that aligned more closely with the world. The official word for their worldview is *relativism*.

If you have circled list 2, have a lot of questions about Truth, or if you're still not sure why this all matters, you are not alone. Most girls your age feel the exact same way. That's why I say the ship is sinking. Our allegiance to God's Truth is taking a nosedive, and no one seems to notice that the ship is taking on water. But if Truth is our sinking ship, it is also our life raft. The Bible gives us a simple promise that can hold us up as we bob through the choppy waters of discovering Truth.

John 8:31–32 says, “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

Jesus says the Truth is knowable. Clearly, He knew about a version of Truth that is absolute (remember that means no *ifs*, *ands*, or *buts*). But He didn't stop there. He also makes a huge promise about the way that the Truth can change our lives: “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Learning the Truth may feel tough at times, but what is the result of knowing? Freedom. Freedom from what? We'll unpack that in the chapters of this book. But the big picture is that Truth gives us freedom from the mess that lies make. Knowing God's Truth gives us freedom because it provides a firm foundation to build our lives on rather than the struggle that comes with trying to live on squishy truth. (Flashback to singing in first-grade Sunday school: "The wise man built his house upon the rock . . .")

freedom



Ultimately, God's Truth frees us from living on a sinking ship.

The life raft of Truth has your name on it, sweet girl. Will you reach out and grab it?



my name is

ERIN

One Girl's Mission to
Make a Difference

Erin Davis

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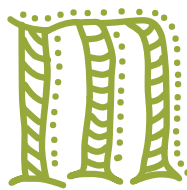
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My name is Erin. I'm a Milk Dud-loving momma who is passionate about a few things, including (in no particular order) my family, the perfect scoop of ice cream, God's Word, a simple life on my little farm, and teaching young women to choose God's Truth.

I bet you're a passionate girl too. Maybe you share my love for farm living and own a horse or two. Maybe you're a writer like me, who gets jazzed about words, stories, and blog posts. Maybe you are especially passionate about children or there's a corner of the world that tugs at your heartstrings. Perhaps you are passionate about a certain band or sports team, fashion, or a well-brewed caramel latte. No matter who you are or where you live, I'm sure there are things that cause your pulse to race and your heart to go pitter-patter.



Some of our passions are simply a byproduct of our environment. We love what our parents love; we get jazzed about whatever makes our friends tick. But I have a theory that there are other passions, the ones that ooze from our very core, that have been woven into our hearts by a passionate God with a passionate plan to take the world by storm. Okay, it's not really my theory. God outlines our mission clearly in His Word. We'll get to that soon.

How can we know which passions are God-given? What should we do with those passions? Should we bridle them or let them run free, giving them reign over the way we live our lives and the choices we make for the future? Is passion a fire we should seek to control or something we should let consume our entire lives?

These are questions I've tried to wrestle to the ground since I was a little girl. (That's me in the fourth grade.)

Like a Chihuahua on a leash, I've bounced back and forth from place to place seeking to find my passion and then wondering what do next. I want to be turned loose with the things that most excite me, but I feel gently pulled back by a God who seems to desire to direct my passions for use in His bigger story.

Speaking of God, why did He make me? What is my purpose on this planet? Do my passions have anything to do with that?

These questions won't win me any awards for originality. People in every culture in every age have wondered, "What am I here for?" As one of billions of people on one planet in one solar system in one of many galaxies, I naturally search for significance. Self-help books tell us to find the answer within ourselves, but those books miss something huge—the God who created us. His Word says that we were created on purpose.

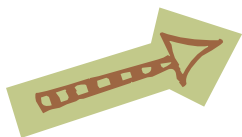


Isaiah 43:7 talks about His people:
“Everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory, whom I
formed and made.”

Read that passage backward. You were
made and formed by God. Why? For His
glory. Your purpose on this planet is tied
to the God who made you. God and your
purpose in life cannot be separated.

With that in mind, is God’s heart
the best place to take our passions? Is He
in charge of deciding our purpose? Will
He show us what it looks like to be created
for His glory?

I’ve opened the Bible and asked God to
answer these questions and to show me my
purpose. I’ve squeezed my passions through
the grid of God’s Word. The result is a plan to
live *on mission*, finding my purpose in using
my God-given passions to do kingdom work.



My name is Erin
and this is my story.



Check out these
hilarious titles of
real self-help books:

The Zombie Survival Guide:
Complete Protection from
the Living Dead

Things I’ve Learned from
Women Who’ve Dumped Me

Faking It: How to Seem
Like a Better Person
without Actually
Improving Yourself



Your Mission (Should You Choose to Accept It)

God has a purpose for your life.

That may sound like a cheesy bumper sticker or a mushy Hallmark card, but that single sentence can radically change your life. You are not an accident. Your life is not a series of coincidences strung together between birth and death. Nope. God has a mission for you. And much like the famous spy in *Mission Impossible*, you have the choice to accept your mission or simply let it self-destruct.

From here on out, you'll read the phrase "living on mission" a lot. Sounds like more spy talk! What does it mean? Living on mission is living on purpose. It is the opposite of floating through life, finding meaning here and there. Living on mission means building a life based on a goal. We will dig up the specifics of that goal in the chapters of this book, but for now, living on mission simply means to do what God made you to do.

Since no mission-minded girl should ever face the world alone, let me introduce you to some girls I know you're gonna love. Before I started writing this book, some friends and I traveled the nation interviewing

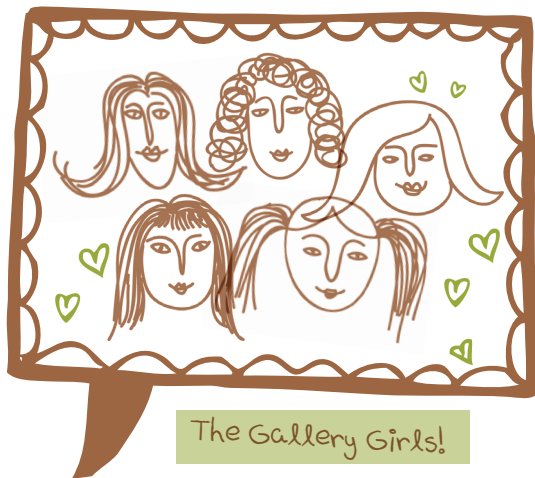


There's an app for self-destructing messages. Software makers have developed a free iPhone app that sends messages that delete themselves within seconds. Now you see it. Now you don't.

girls just like you about what it means to live life on a mission. We went to big cities and small towns and everywhere in between. The girls we talked to had been exposed to plenty of Christian talk. They know how to talk the talk about God and purpose. (I call that speaking Christianese.) The girls went to different schools and had different interests, but they had something in common: They wanted their lives to matter. They longed to be a part of something bigger than themselves. But they weren't quite there . . . yet.

They also loved to talk. That's why I've nicknamed them the **Gab Gallery**. From here on out, I'll just call them the Gallery. You'll hear their stories and read their thoughts throughout the pages of this book. Their role is to make you feel like you are part of a conversation about finding purpose (because you are!).

The Gallery girls loved talking about purpose. Of all the subjects we covered with them, purpose got them the most excited (then they really started talking). In fact, these were girls with passions for big causes like Kids Against Hunger, Compassion International, and Invisible Children.



We're not talking about lemonade stands and helping little old ladies across the street here! These girls saw the value in causes that influenced millions of lives. And yet, everywhere we went, there was a gap between the Gallery girls' passions and living their lives with a mission in mind. These girls were passionate, but they had a sideline mentality. "I will cheer you on" was their general attitude about anything big that was happening for the kingdom.

"Grown-ups are given all the credit if I do something big," they said.

"It's assumed that adults are just more sophisticated and smarter. They assume that we won't understand," they said when pressed about why they aren't living on mission now.

The Gallery girls said they wanted to live their lives on mission, but there was this sense that living on mission was something they would do later and that God had big plans for them "someday." They thought that mission-minded living was for people with

college degrees, fancy jobs, and fat bank accounts. Sure, they prayed and read their Bibles, but putting their faith into action was for later. They knew a lot about God's Word, but they didn't yet base their decisions on God's Truth.



Find out more about
the Gallery girls' passions
on these websites:
kidsagainsthunger.org
Compassion.com
invisiblechildren.com
girlscouts.org

Hello. It's God Calling.

I became a Christian when I was fifteen. From then on, I was fascinated by people who did big things with their faith. I told anyone who would listen to me that God was going to use me to do something important too, but I didn't have a clue what that would look like. I admired missionaries who sold everything to reach needy people in faraway lands. I adored pastors who passionately preached God's Word to the masses. I loved the Mother Teresas and Billy Grahams who did radical things for the kingdom. The giants of the faith often talked about feeling "called." It was as if God sent an assignment directly to their smartphone, and they answered, "Yes, Lord!" Now, that's living on mission!

But me? I had math homework. I had a curfew. I had parents who seemed more interested in how clean my bedroom was than if I was living out my God-given purpose. From the very moment I became a Christian, I wanted to do big things for God, yet what was my purpose exactly? How could I live on mission when I was still so young?

And so I waited. I waited for tools I did not need and missed out on an exciting mission that only required obedience to God and His Word.

If I had a time machine, I'd go back and do things differently.

I don't have a time machine, but maybe I don't need one. This book isn't just about me. It's a chance to rewrite the pages of your own story, a chance to take it from an average tale to the kind of epic adventure that

only gets written about girls who live their lives for something bigger than themselves. It doesn't matter how old you are. It doesn't matter if you've got a stack of homework to do. It doesn't matter if you're on the volleyball team, the honor roll, or the list of who's most likely to succeed.



God's got a purpose for your life. You are called to do important things just like the people who seem like giants of the faith. The question is, will you shift your thinking toward God's view of purpose? Will you let Him shape your passions into a mission for His glory?

There's that word again—*passion*. I know we just met, but I'm going to make a prediction. I bet there is a connection between what you're passionate about and the mission God wants to call you to. Or maybe God has set a passion deep inside your heart. It's lying there dormant, waiting for you to seek God's plan for the way you live your life from this point forward.

With that in mind, we will use passion as a starting point. In the space below write down the things you are most passionate about. Now, don't speak Christianese. *Don't write down a churchy answer that you think might impress your Sunday school teacher* (I doubt she will be reading your list). Get real about what really excites you. If you don't have a passion yet, that's okay. God wants to show you His passion in the pages of His Word, and it's contagious. It won't be long until you've got something really cool to be passionate about.



I am passionate about:



That list is just a beginning, a springboard to send us off in search of our purpose. Before we launch too high, we'd better take a minute to check in with mission control.

So put down your book for a minute and ask God to use this book to show you His purpose for your life. Your prayer might sound something like this: “God, thank You for creating me to bring glory to You. I’m not sure exactly what that means, but I want my life to matter. I want You to use me to do something big. Would You show me my purpose through Your Word?”



my name is

ERIN

One Girl's Plan for
Radical Faith

Erin Davis

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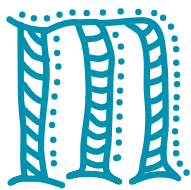
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My name is Erin. I live on a farm smack dab in the middle of America's heartland—as in, a *real farm*, with chickens and horses, a donkey named Bart, and a tiny herd of goats. In many ways my life is pretty average. I love my family. I love my job. I love my church. I have the best friends a girl could ask for and when they're not available, a chick flick and a bowl of popcorn (extra butter, please) are welcome to keep me company any time. At first glance, my life seems just like everyone else's. But look closer, and I hope you'll see that there's something different about me (and I'm not just talking about all the livestock!).

I wish I could invite every reader of this book over for a visit. We'd take a hayride and roast marshmallows over a bonfire, and I'd tell you about my journey from being a girl who knew about God to being a girl who knew God to being a girl who let God turn her life upside down.



Erin's List of the Top Five Chick Flicks of All Time

- The Princess Bride
- Gone with the Wind
- My Girl
- Steel Magnolias
- The Little Mermaid

I'd tell you I'm not interested in just having faith in Jesus. I don't just want to check the box for Christian, like crossing chores off a to-do list, and then blend in with the crowd. I want a radical faith that changes everything about my life. I want you to have a radical faith too.



What do you think of when you hear the word *radical*? Do you imagine someone who dresses weird, talks weirder, and seems to do whatever it takes to stick out like a sore thumb? Is a radical someone who carries picket signs or marches for a cause she's passionate about? What about standing up for your faith, even if it costs you? Is that what it takes to be radical?

All of those things are unconventional, but you don't necessarily have to dress strange or stage a sit-in to be radical. In fact, the Bible is chock-full of radical followers of God. We'll look at many of their stories in the pages of this book, but you don't have to time travel into the Old Testament Promised Land or New Testament Palestine to find people with radical faith. If radical simply means different from the usual, then any of us who are willing to be shaped into the image of Jesus can fit the bill.

I won't sugarcoat it—radical faith has its challenges. But Jesus went first. He showed us what a radical life, lived for God's glory,

looks like. Then He simply says, “Follow Me,” down the path He’s already taken.

I’ve been a non-Christian, a lukewarm Christian, and a Christian on fire to live like God calls me to. Which is the best way to live? The answer is a no-brainer. Once you’ve experienced radical life in Christ, nothing else will satisfy.

My name is Erin,
and this is my story.



This Changes Everything

I grew up going to church. I knew all about baby Jesus in the manger and baby Moses in the basket. I could sing “Father Abraham” and “Deep and Wide” with the best of them, but I never thought much about how that fountain flowing deep and wide could impact my life or why I was one of Father Abraham’s “many sons.”



“Deep and Wide” may be describing the fountain of Christ’s love described in this passage: “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (Ephesians 3:17-18 NIV). Find out why you are a daughter of Abraham in Genesis 22.

Jesus was someone I talked about at church, but that's usually where I left Him. I believed He existed, but I didn't put my hope in Him or allow His Word to influence the way I lived my life.

That all changed the summer before my sophomore year of high school.



My family decided to check out a new church on a Sunday morning. We had been barely attending a sluggish church in my small town before then. I never heard much that seemed to apply to my life, and frankly, everyone looked kind of miserable. I often wondered if trusting Jesus meant turning in my smile in exchange for a frown. But as the worship music keyed up at the new

church, something seemed . . . different. The pastor preached with passion from the Word of God, and what he said felt important.

After the service the youth pastor came up and invited me to join the youth group on a trip to camp leaving the next morning. *Looking back, I'm surprised I said yes.* It meant hopping on a bus with people I'd never met to learn more about a God I had kept at arm's length, but the next day I loaded my suitcase onto the bus along with seventeen other teenagers and began a twelve-hour bus ride toward a radical change.

The very first night of camp, I felt overwhelmed by the love of God and the reality of my own sinfulness. It was suddenly clear that serving Him wasn't about being a good girl or being in church every time the doors were open. God wasn't interested in giving me a to-do list. Clearly, if I wanted to follow Christ, I needed a radical change of heart. It was as if God wanted to

perform open-heart surgery on me in that camp sanctuary, taking out the parts of me that wanted to just skate through life and replacing them with a vibrant love and passion for Him.

Maybe you've had a moment like that—a time in your history when God did something radical in your own heart. Putting your faith and trust in Him certainly feels like taking a giant leap, but really it's just the beginning of the exciting, and—yes—radical journey that comes with agreeing to live as God calls you to.



Take a moment to write about a time when
God called you to radical change.



Roll Call of Radicals

Meet Elijah. Elijah was a prophet assigned to warn his people about God's anger because of their worship over the false god Baal. Elijah gave his prediction of a drought to the wicked leader of his day and then fled to live by a brook for several months. There he was fed by ravens—as in, birds

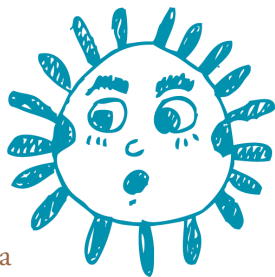
literally delivered his breakfast, lunch, and dinner. When the brook dried up, Elijah obeyed God's voice again and went to live with a widow he did not know. When her son got sick, Elijah lay on him three times and the boy was healed (1 Kings 17). Later Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal and called down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18). At the end of his ministry, Elijah was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind of fiery chariots and horses (2 Kings 2:11).

Nothing Elijah did fit the mold of a normal life.

Today we might call him "eccentric" or say that Elijah was an outcast. But Elijah wasn't just different for *different's* sake. Elijah listened closely to the voice of God. When God told Elijah to move to a brook, he did. When God told him to ask a stranger for food and shelter, he did. When God asked Elijah to confront the prophets of Baal, Elijah did it, even though he was outnumbered 450 to 1. When God sent chariots of fire and horses to Elijah at the end of his life, Elijah got caught up in the whirlwind.

Elijah was a radical.

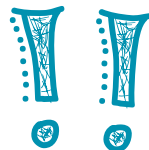
Joshua was born as a slave in Egypt. He became a conqueror in the Promised Land. When Moses sent twelve spies to scope out the land God promised them, most of them came back shaking in their boots because they saw big challenges. Joshua, however, was ready to charge in full speed. He knew God had his back (Numbers 13). But because Joshua was in the minority, his people were forced to wander for forty years. Of the twelve spies, only Joshua and Caleb (who



also thought they should take the Promised Land) survived long enough to live in the land of milk and honey (Numbers 14).

Joshua went on to become Moses's successor. He led his people in several military campaigns, including the strange battle of Jericho, where their military strategy was to walk in circles and blow trumpets. Because Joshua obeyed, they won the battle without ever lifting a sword (Joshua 6)!

Joshua goes down in history as a radical because of his unwavering trust in God. He obeyed God even when it was unpopular or untraditional. Following God when no one else does—now that's radical!



How about Paul? Paul strikes me as a man of extremes. When we first meet him in the book of Acts his name is Saul and he is supervising the death of Stephen (another radical!). In fact, Saul led a campaign to kill and imprison Christians. Acts 8:3 tells us that “Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.”

I guess radical isn't always a good thing.

But then Saul had a truly radical encounter with God. Acts 9 tells the story of Saul's conversion from radical against Jesus to a radical for Jesus. He was walking on the road to Damascus, on his way to find more Christians to throw into jail, when God struck him blind. Sometimes God has to take radical measures to get our attention! God Himself spoke to Saul and asked him why he was persecuting Him (because when you mess with Jesus' followers, you mess with Him).



we tend to
think of Him in
happy pictures
with a perpetual
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We imagine Him as
a baby in a manger
or in flowing robes
with children on His
lap. Those images
are part of Jesus'
life, but the bigger
picture is much
more, well,
radical!

In the face of such a dramatic encounter, Paul chose to acknowledge that Jesus was Lord. Then his life got really radical. He made three long missionary journeys, planting churches and sharing the radical message of the gospel. I told you that radical life will likely cost you. It certainly cost Paul. He endured prison, beatings, shipwrecks, threats, and hunger in order to follow God. But a radical counts the cost and serves God anyway.

In Philippians 3:7–8 Paul wrote, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”

Paul said nothing compares to being a radical for Christ. In fact, everything else is rubbish, garbage, destined for the trash heap. Paul reached radical status because of his encounter with the most radical one of all—Jesus.

Speaking of Jesus . . . we tend to think of Him in happy pictures with a perpetual smile on his face. We imagine Him as a baby in a manger or in flowing robes with children on His lap. Those images are part of Jesus' life, but the bigger picture is much more, well, radical!

Maybe you've heard of the Pharisees and the Sadducees? We hear about them often in the New Testament. They were the religious leaders while Jesus was alive. If following God were about following rules, these guys would be spiritual superstars, but their hearts were rotten. Jesus was always blasting them for trying to follow God by checking off a long to-do list of rules while ignoring their own sin. These guys were the current "big dogs" of the faith, and Jesus faced them down. That was certainly radical.

Then there's Jesus' team. He assembled a ragtag bunch of average Joes to help Him spread the radical message that He was God's Son. These guys were not pastors. They didn't have degrees from Bible college. But they were willing to be radical for the cause of Christ. That was the only thing Jesus looked at when He examined their resumes.



Once He had a team of radicals assembled, Jesus really shook things up. He started healing and preaching and hanging out with tax collectors and prostitutes. People were so shocked by how different Jesus was that they usually had one of two reactions. Either they abandoned everything to follow Him, or they determined to do whatever it took to stop Him.

Jesus said all kinds of radical things, like "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple"

(Luke 14:26), and “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). He even said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Jesus wasn't inviting everyone to sit around a bonfire and sing a happy song. Sure He preached about God's love, but He didn't come to earth to give everyone a giant, warm, fuzzy feeling. His message was radical. We are sinners. Our sin keeps us from God. And He, the one and only Son of God, had come to pay the price for that sin. But following Him will cost us.

Now that's radical.

Spotting a Radical

What do these radicals from the pages of the Bible have in common?



They trusted God.



They listened to God's voice and then obeyed—even when it cost them.



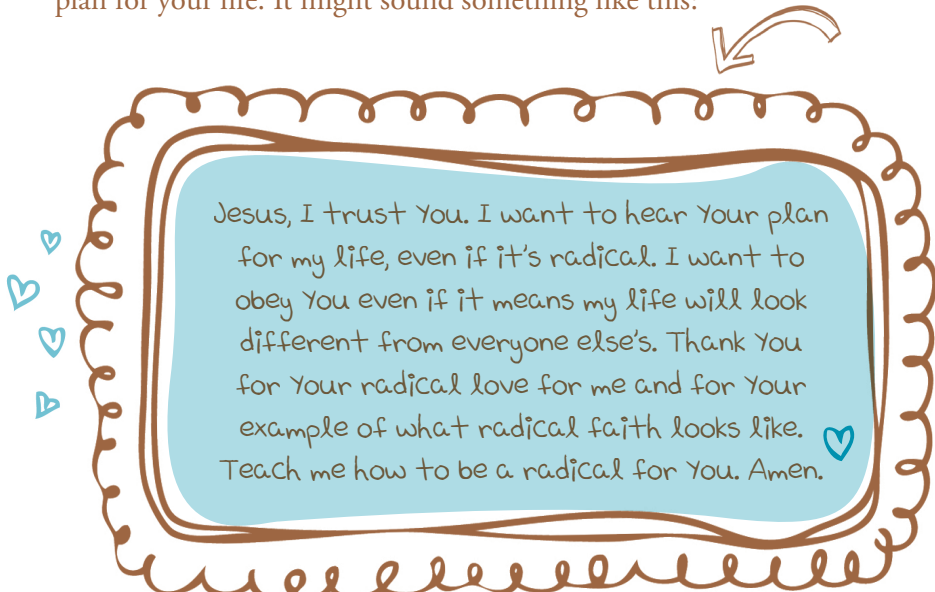
Because of their faith, they lived lives that looked different from everyone else's.

That's a short list and a tall order, but basically it means you can be a radical too. There's nothing on that list that is impossible for you. There's nothing on that list that requires you to be older, more financially stable,

or have a college degree. No matter who you are or where you live you can live a radical faith.

The rest of this book is highly practical. You'll have the chance to discover what a radical faith might look like for you. But you have to take the first step and trust God that the life He calls you to is the very best way to live.

With that in mind, take some time to ask God to show you His radical plan for your life. It might sound something like this:



Jesus, I trust You. I want to hear Your plan for my life, even if it's radical. I want to obey You even if it means my life will look different from everyone else's. Thank You for Your radical love for me and for Your example of what radical faith looks like. Teach me how to be a radical for You. Amen.