

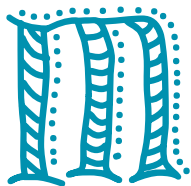
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My name is Erin. I live on a farm smack dab in the middle of America's heartland—as in, a *real farm*, with chickens and horses, a donkey named Bart, and a tiny herd of goats. In many ways my life is pretty average. I love my family. I love my job. 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!).

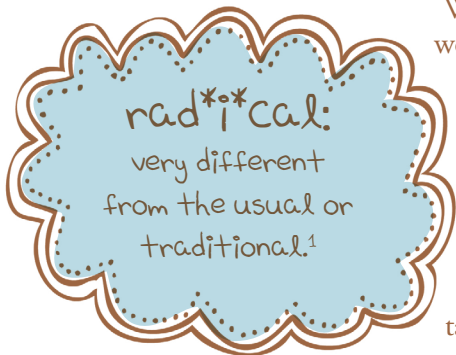
I wish I could invite every reader of this book over for a visit. We'd take a hayride and roast marshmallows over a bonfire, and I'd tell you about my journey from being a girl who knew about God to being a girl who knew God to being a girl who let God turn her life upside down.



### 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.




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## 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

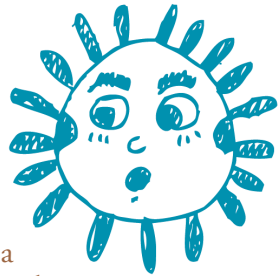
literally delivered his breakfast, lunch, and dinner. When the brook dried up, Elijah obeyed God's voice again and went to live with a widow he did not know. When her son got sick, Elijah lay on him three times and the boy was healed (1 Kings 17). Later Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal and called 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.

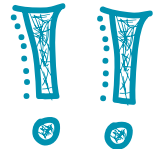
Joshua was born as a slave in Egypt. He became a conqueror in the Promised Land. When Moses sent twelve spies to scope out the land God promised them, most of them came back shaking in their boots because they saw big challenges. Joshua, however, was ready to charge in full speed. He knew God had his 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).





## 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!

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:

