


Drawing from the Scriptures and the life of Jesus, Stowell provides a hope-filled, courageous response that empowers us to light up the darkness by living like Jesus in a non-Jesus world.

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HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

.....
*If the foundations are destroyed,
what can the righteous do?*

PSALM 11:3

Soon after my retirement from Christian higher education, my wife, Martie, and I decided to take up a new way of life. Wanting to visit the national parks out west, we thought we'd get a camper and do it the right way. This was a high-risk adventure since we had never camped a day in our lives! Thankfully, we have come to love camping and living in faraway places off the beaten path.

As you may know, many campgrounds have shower facilities that provide the opportunity of freshening up while roughing it. One morning, on my way to the shower, I noticed a man in front of me with a towel rolled in his hand. I knew that he was headed to the shower and would probably beat me there. But he stopped at the sink to shave as I went on to claim one of the two shower stalls.

I greeted another guy who was preparing to step into the adjacent shower. He returned the greeting and began to tell me how terrible it was that in this day of "trans" rights and other items on the so-called

progressive agenda, he wouldn't dare bring his young daughter to a shower at a campground. His monologue didn't stop there. While the two shower stalls were separate, the wall between us only went up about seven feet with an opening above. He went on about the horrible political and social climate in America and the power of the LGBTQ+ movement. Legalizing marijuana made his list of complaints. Gender identity pronouns and the lack of a definition of what a woman is also found a place in the diatribe. As the rant went on, individual politicians were also targeted. Then he said, "I go to a great church and my pastor is all over this stuff. He has no tolerance for any of it!"

When he said he went to church I thought, "Hey, he's a brother!" So, wanting to lower the temperature a bit, I said, "Yeah, but I've read the last chapter. King Jesus wins!"

He replied, "Right, but we've got to fight!"

He had every reason to be concerned. In fact, I share some of his concerns. But it was the hateful, fist-in-your face, warrior tone that bothered me. He and his pastor, like many politically annoyed parishioners and clergy today, had drawn a line in the sand and declared war: not just against the policies of the progressives but against the progressives themselves.

As I left the shower, the gentleman who had stopped to shave was waiting with his towel folded, next in line. There's no doubt that he had heard the rant. I felt embarrassed for the gospel. If someone would say to him, "Would you be interested in becoming a Christian? You could be just like us," it would be a nonstarter.

ATTITUDE SHIFT

Not all of us are angry. But there is a prevailing sense that we are the losers and that the bad guys have won, leaving us downhearted and fearful for the future. The problem with this kind of posture is that, given our

privileged responsibility of attracting others to Jesus, no one is going to be attracted to a group of hopeless, despairing losers! People already have enough about which to despair. With rising rates of suicide, the crisis of anxiety among younger generations, chaos in our cities, random violence that terrorizes innocent people, and the prevailing anger and frustration with deepening divisions of racial and political issues, many in our world already feel a sense of hopelessness and despair.

I get the anger part. Every time I see a headline celebrating the advance of some progressive agenda that magnifies our loss, I feel the negative energy. And, I guess, there would be something wrong with me if I just shrugged it off as though it didn't make any difference.

We need an attitude shift that puts out the welcome mat of the gospel to all.

CJ Stroud, rookie quarterback for the Houston Texans, is a deeply committed follower of Jesus. After defeating the Cleveland Browns in the first round of the NFL playoff games, he started his after-game interview by saying, "First, I want to give all the glory to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!" I was watching the interview and was thrilled that a brother had turned the spotlight away from himself and onto Jesus. But when I noticed that NBC Sports, who put the interview on X, deleted his testimony, it triggered the kind of anger we feel when we are reminded of the disdain our world has for comments like that.¹ I thought, "Now they've canceled Jesus. So much for tolerance! Do I really live in an America where someone's testimony is banned from public discourse?"

So the issue is not the anger part. It's an internal trigger that something is wrong. The issue is knowing what to do with the negative energy that is triggered by the anger. Paul exhorts us, "Be angry and do not sin" (Eph. 4:26). That means that our anger—even when appropriate and righteous—can lead us to do the wrong kinds of things. Paul goes on to say, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." So at best, our anger

needs to be short-lived, without misguided actions, and channeled to positive outcomes.

We might dismiss the concerned shower-taker as a one-off. But being around Christians over the last couple of decades brings me to a different conclusion. The conclusion is that we need an attitude shift that presents an attractive alternative to a watching world and a clear strategy of biblically advised actions that puts out the welcome mat of the gospel to all.

IN THE TIMES WE ARE GIVEN

Francis Schaeffer asked in his now prophetic critique of the cultural shift, “How should we then live?”² Schaeffer and his wife, Edith, founded L’Abri (“shelter”) in Switzerland in the 1970s, a place for seekers to talk and explore ideas about culture and spirituality. The Schaeffers’ message was that Western society had changed because the foundation had shifted from a Christian basis to a secular one, from one based on eternal truths of God as Creator to one in which human beings are at the center. Sound familiar? And this was decades ago! It is no secret that the mores of our society have grown less God-centered since Dr. Schaeffer so presciently spoke.

American Christians are rightly concerned about the troubling realities of the shift in our culture. On nearly every front of society things are different now. And much of the shift is in direct contradiction to the convictions that we have cherished and consider to be divinely declared, leaving us with the sense that we have lost. There is a new sheriff in town, and it’s not our kind of guy. Holding on to what in our eyes is good and right feels like a losing battle. In many ways, we have lost the role that Christianity played in promoting the Judeo-Christian values that governed life and defined our national identity. We feel like Frodo, in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when he faced the danger of the Black Riders. “I knew that danger lay ahead, of course; but I did not expect to meet it in our own Shire.”³

Some may be more optimistic than I am about getting America back on track and reclaiming the values that once united us. Yet it's hard to imagine that we could pivot to a cultural consensus about issues like the sanctity of life, human sexuality, gender, and changes to our definition of marriage. To again quote from Tolkien, Frodo says, "I wish none of this had happened." Wise Gandalf replies, "So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us."⁴

"How should we then live?" remains a crucial question.

WHAT CAN THE RIGHTEOUS DO?

In one way, it's not difficult to answer the question. As Americans we have the advantage of influencing culture by supporting and voting for candidates that affirm and advance our values. We can attend meetings and run for school boards. We can take our place on county commissions. We can easily email our elected representatives and let them know how we as their constituents will vote. We might even run for public offices ourselves. We can volunteer to support the causes we feel are worthy of our time and effort. We can responsibly and courteously use social media to express our views. And, thankfully, pastors are still able to preach boldly into every aspect of life when it comes to clear biblical principles.

Though it rarely makes the news, followers of Christ and many churches and organizations are doing amazing things to influence our culture in a positive way.

But apart from these legitimate activities it is clear that many have opted for a variety of other approaches. Some are flat-out mad and in a fighting mood, placing their hope in political conquest. Others have acquiesced to the change and drifted downstream with the culture. Still others, in despair, have retreated into a holy huddle

hoping that Jesus will soon return and rescue them . . . all of which are the wrong responses if we are evaluating the possibilities from a biblical perspective.

By *not* knowing what the right thing is to do, I fear we may actually be doing the wrong things in response to the shift. Like children who want to help Dad with a project and who, in spite of their good intentions, actually get in the way and do more harm than good.

This is not to say we're all doing more harm than good. Though it rarely makes the news, followers of Christ and many churches and organizations are doing amazing things to influence our culture in positive ways—ways that are in sync with what Jesus would do, and ways we can be lights in the darkness.

But some have done more harm than good by moving into our culture with angry attitudes and misguided actions, and evangelical Christians are often called out on this point. Not every Christian is an evangelical, of course, but I'm assuming that most of you reading this book identify as such. Unfortunately, evangelicals are often better known for political positions than allegiance to Christ and His kingdom. Sadly, often the marriage of our faith with politics is accompanied by hostile, warring attitudes toward others who don't share our values.

It should be noted here that “evangelical” is not always easily defined. But while it is difficult to nail down every aspect of evangelicalism, British historian David Bebbington has articulated the following four widely accepted identifiers of an evangelical.⁵

- Biblicism: the high view of the authority of Scripture
- Crucicentrism: the centrality of the work of the cross and its saving benefit

- Conversionism: the desire to convert others to the saving work of Jesus
- Activism: sharing the message of the gospel through tangible actions

While all evangelicals are Christians, not all Christians would consider themselves to be evangelical. And though the general feeling among many is that evangelicals are aligned with a right-wing political ideology, not all evangelicals would identify with that assessment.

WHAT IS JESUS' WAY?

In light of this often-negative approach toward those who don't share our values and our propensity to politicize our faith, this would be a good time to ask, "What would Jesus want us to do?" Thankfully, He has a better way. A way that transforms our attitudes and redirects our actions to positive outcomes in terms of influencing our culture and drawing curious observers to Himself.

So before we ask with the psalmist, "What can the righteous do when the foundations are destroyed?" (Ps. 11:13), let's look to Jesus. If we are willing to ask what He would have us do, we must brace ourselves for some revolutionary answers that contradict our normal instincts. When it comes to engaging culture, Jesus has a far different agenda that is in sync with a far different kingdom than the kingdoms of this world. Remember the Lord's words to Isaiah? He reminded him that His thoughts and His ways are different than those of mankind (Isa. 55:8). So I'll warn you: the agenda is challenging. It's an agenda that is counterintuitive and easy to dismiss if you're looking for a strategy that seems instinctively right to you.

When it comes to influencing our culture for Christ, His ways will seem too soft to some. Too slow to turn the tables on our world for others. Too much like a skewed or watered-down gospel to a few. Too much like a losing strategy to those who think we need to fight if we are to win. If we are given to our natural instincts, it will be easy to resist His ways and proceed with what *we* think may be right.

In the end, it doesn't make much difference what I write in terms of influencing our fallen culture for Christ. If it's just what I think, then its validity is up for grabs. But if it's clearly what Jesus has prescribed, then the argument is with Him: the one who is *the* way and *the* truth.

————— **TO THINK ABOUT** —————

How would you describe your attitude toward the shift in our culture?

*Would you be willing to surrender to the ways of Jesus regardless
of what they might be?*

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