



TO WHOM MUCH IS GIVEN...

By Greg Wiens

Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

By David Platt

Multnomah Books, 240 pp. \$14.99

I will often hear leaders mention that they have a favorite book, one that they need to read every few years to remind them of what life is all about. *Radical* by David Platt surely could be one such book. In this short tome, Platt lays bare a picture of contemporary Western Christianity, which isn't pretty. Rather than just criticize the problems in the current church, *Radical* offers concrete solutions for what ails her.

Platt illustrates how the American dream has become intertwined with the gospel to produce a form of Christianity in America that is easy, comfortable and safe. He looks at how large, commercialized churches spend their budgets and how they have strayed from what Biblical priorities would dictate. Unfortunately, in his examination of most churches, Platt comes upon this problem time and again: following Christ as depicted by the modern church is unrecognizable from how scriptures depict it. Jesus asked for abandonment and sacrifice; pain and suffering for others is the expectation, not the exception.

Platt explains that he came to truly understand the contorted view of western Christianity when he visited churches in other countries and found believers who were much more committed and much more persecuted. Put simply, he discovered that stateside Christians have become too comfortable and content. They are unwilling to risk very much, let alone their lives to spread the news of Christ. If they give at all, it is usually within a sphere of comfort.

Though Platt initially focuses on the needs of others around the world, he is very clear that there is also a responsibility for churches to meet needs within their own communities and spheres of influence. He presents a balanced view of what a life dedicated to the teachings of Christ would look like in our contemporary culture. He is very practical and transparent in showing how he has personally applied these teachings to his life.

This year-long experiment appears in *Radical* for those who would like to attempt to apply what he has presented in the book. Here are some examples of the suggested actions:

1. Pray for the entire world (in daily pieces)
2. Read through the entire Bible (in a year)
3. Sacrifice your money for a specific purpose (sacrifice requires more than just giving)
4. Spend your time in another context (at least a week in a foreign country)
5. Commit your life to a multiplying community (not just church on Sundays, but a community that speaks into your life as a disciple and requires active participation)

It is helpful to understand that Platt is one of the youngest pastors of one of the largest and fastest-growing churches in the United States, located in Birmingham, Ala. As pastor of a very large church, he accepts his responsibility in addressing the problems. He is willing to take radical steps in his church to ensure people understand the costs of discipleship.

As I read *Radical*, I found myself in wholehearted agreement with Platt. I have had global experiences similar to the ones described in the book and have seen firsthand how the American dream has perverted the gospel of the New Testament. I am a little concerned, however, that his attack and solutions may be somewhat limited to a middle-class, southern church culture. These also may not encompass the long-term health of a church, such as the ability to transform its culture through multiple generations. This is because the reader is made to feel that you must give it all away, rather than enjoy life; there seems little room for grace and fun. Though Platt does not say this, it is a natural conclusion that many readers may make.

This book is a wonderful corrective to Christians who live in their insulated shells and attend churches designed to meet all of their needs. Unfortunately, this is much of today's Christian church in America. However, more and more Christians are realizing the dissonance between what they read in the Bible and how they live their lives, and want to do something about it. *Radical* is an important part of this movement, because it goes beyond the ideological to the practical. That, in itself, sounds pretty Christ-like.

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