

SAMPLE WORKBOOK

RED LETTER

CHALLENGE

A 40 DAY LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE

ZACH ZEHNDER

Red Letter Challenge

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THE WHY BEHIND

THE RED LETTER CHALLENGE

Why does the world around us and the life we live not look anything like the reality Jesus talked about? Why is there no significant difference between the lives of those who call themselves Christians and the rest of the world? What kind of witness can we be in this world if we simply look the same as everyone else? If we are a poor representation of who God is, then what needs to change? What can we do? Rather than shrugging it off, isn't it time to change people's perceptions about the followers of Jesus Christ?

These questions kept bothering me. I kept thinking there has to be something we can do about this. That's when something so simple came to me – something so simple it was genius. What if we take the words of Jesus and actually put them into practice? If we could actually do this, surely that would change people's perceptions about those who follow Jesus!

I know what you are thinking: "That's the big idea?" Yes, that's it. And it wasn't even my idea! That's why I knew it was genius, because I actually stole this idea from Jesus Himself.

Jesus finishes the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon ever preached, by saying this in Matthew 7:24-27:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Jesus is saying, "If you want your house to stand up, practice what I'm preaching. Do what I say." Jesus says in Luke 11:28: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." James, the brother of Jesus, says it even more simply in James 1:22: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

That's the big idea. Taking Jesus' words, the ones that are written in red letters in your Bibles, and putting them into practice. Literally. That's the very unoriginal yet revolutionary idea that's going to change not just the followers of Jesus, but the world in which we live!

I looked and looked for something that gave followers of Jesus clear, practical action steps to take what He said and then put those words into practice. There are many great books and resources out there, but I couldn't find anything that organizes the literal words that Jesus spoke and then issues a clear challenge based on that teaching.

I decided this idea needed to be tested. At the time, I was a young pastor in the first full year of a small new church plant. We were looking for ways to get involved in the community and advance the Kingdom of God in our area. Personally, I was trying to awaken the members of my church. You see, at the time, my church was made up mostly of long-time Christians. These were people who had believed in God most of their lives. They were used to church and had gotten into patterns of being surrounded only by Christian friends and serving three or four days a week (but always at the church building). The biggest way they stepped out of their comfort zones was ushering during a church service. Really? People who were forty, fifty, even sixty years into their faith and the way they were being "stretched" by God was by showing someone to a seat, passing an offering plate, and counting heads! My five-year old could have done that - well, as long as the counting didn't go into the hundreds!

However, they were open to trying something new and they were excited about all of the possibilities that might come from it. They were especially eager to see how this Challenge would work. They were committed to doing whatever it took to reach our community, and especially those who didn't believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

That's when we implemented the Red Letter Challenge at our church. What would it look like for a whole church, new to the area but excited about the future, to literally practice the words of God together? The results were amazing and lives were changed! The community was changed! The individuals who took part were challenged to new heights in their relationship with Christ, and ultimately our church grew as well. God did incredible things through the Challenge!

People were doing things they never thought were possible. And because we were doing it together, they knew they had the support and accountability of everyone else in the church. We had so many amazing things happen during that first Challenge that we decided to do it again the following year!

I've been blessed by this Challenge. Those who have been through it have been blessed by it. Our church has been blessed by it. Most importantly, our communities were blessed by it and we are changing the perception in our area of who Jesus Christ is. We know this workbook you have in your hands right now is going to bless you and many others if you take this Challenge seriously.

People who are new to the faith have often asked me, "How do I follow Jesus? What am I supposed to do?" Even people who have believed and followed Jesus for much of their life struggle to answer that question. As I explored Christ's words, I found that He asked His followers to do many things, but He spent a good portion of His time focused on five main principles.

1 Being **2** Forgiving **3** Serving **4** Giving **5** Going

We re-organized the Challenge to introduce each of these five principles over the first five days. The following five weeks then focus on each of these principles for one full week. And what you have in your hands right now is the complete 40-Day Red Letter Challenge!

By putting God's words into practice, you will find the life God has made for you! You will be led to spend more time with the God who loves you. You will serve and sacrifice more than you ever have before. You will forgive people you never thought you would be able to. (That person may even be yourself!) You will become a more generous person. You will be more bold and courageous in what you say and in how you live. And through the entire Challenge, you will celebrate and enjoy the life God has given you!

Another thing that will probably happen is you will fail! Sorry for the harsh words. But I've never done the Challenge perfectly. There's been a day I missed here and there or an idea that was too hard for me for a particular day. If this happens to you, I invite you to write down your thoughts for that day and why you struggled. You will find that perhaps you are stronger in some areas than others in your faith.

Being a follower of Jesus is not always pretty, and sometimes we mess up. We have forgiveness for those times and God urges us to come back to Him and keep following after Him. Whether you are experiencing success or failure, I want to encourage you not to get frustrated. Just keep moving on. What we are hoping to create is a new habit in your life. We don't want you to just do what God says for 40 days and then never think about it again. I hope the practice of implementing Jesus' words in your life will become a daily occurrence for you. Habit formation isn't an overnight process. It takes a while. But you have to start somewhere, so let's start with His words and embark together on the Red Letter Challenge!

BY PUTTING
GOD'S WORDS
LITERALLY INTO
PRACTICE, YOU
WILL FIND THE
LIFE GOD HAS
MADE FOR YOU!

HOW TO DO

THE RED LETTER CHALLENGE

Okay, you are ready for the Challenge, but how does it work? What's this going to look like?

The first five days will serve as an introduction. You'll learn a bit more about each of the five major principles from Jesus. From there, on each of the following 35 days, you will see a quote directly from the mouth of Jesus. The quotation will be followed by a devotion, one or more companion Bible readings, and a Challenge of how you might live out those specific words on that day. Some will be very specific and others will be very broad. Each day you will be encouraged to complete the Challenge.

The rhythm of a follower, or a disciple, of Jesus is to be both a hearer and a doer of what God says. That's why for each day there's a corresponding Bible story or passage as well as a Challenge for how to implement Christ's words into your life. Too many followers of Jesus read the Bible but never put those words into practice. Likewise, there are many who do good works but aren't sure why they are doing them.

Putting God's words into practice is much more effective when you are not alone. Many times it is hard to do what God asks. Some of the days you might feel like you want to give up. That's why I suggest bringing someone along with you in this Challenge. Pick someone you trust. Do the Challenge with this person and use each other as accountability partners. Or even better, grab a few friends, your staff, or even your entire church, and invite them to come alongside you on this journey.

We live in an interactive world, and we want to know how this Challenge is going for you and how it is impacting you and your community. This Challenge will move you in many ways. You will have a lot of feelings and emotions as you go through it. This workbook is designed to capture those feelings, thoughts, and emotions. Be honest and fair with yourself as you complete the Challenges.

Finally, I encourage you to post your thoughts on our Facebook page ([fb.me/redletterchallenge](https://www.facebook.com/redletterchallenge)) and use the hashtag #RedLetterChallenge whenever you are referencing it on any social media platform like Instagram. Let us know how putting God's words into practice went for the day. Was it easy? Was it hard? Why? Why not? Were you unable to complete the Challenge for today? If so, what got in the way?

DOING

THE RED LETTER CHALLENGE AS A CHURCH

Pastors and church leaders, do any of the following apply to you?

- 1 You want your people to spend more time with God on a daily basis.
- 2 You want a greater presence in the community in which you serve.
- 3 You want your people to live greater lives of service and sacrifice.
- 4 You want your church to be more generous.
- 5 You want your people to be bolder in their faith.
- 6 You want your people to experience the freedom that comes from God's forgiveness.
- 7 You want your church to have active, engaging home groups that meet during the week.
- 8 You want a resource to point people to after they have received Jesus Christ in their life that gives them very clear direction on what to do next.

I'm betting that many of these apply to you! You are hoping for deeper spiritual formation in your church, yet you know that many people have grown stale in their faith and confuse being disciples of Christ with being volunteers.

This Challenge will awaken the members and attendees at your church.

It will invigorate your church and you will find people in your church doing things they (and you!) never thought were possible!

There is nothing better than a church doing the words of Christ together.

Doing what God asks us to do is not meant to be done alone.

We have organized small group curriculum as well as full sermon manuscripts and videos on our website (www.redletterchallenge.com), and you can access all of it for free. This Challenge is best done when everyone is not only doing the Challenge on a daily basis by themselves, but also regularly meeting in home groups to discuss the Challenges together. It's also extremely valuable for people to hear you as the pastor talk about the importance of the five main principles as part of a weekend teaching series. Also, we recommend that your church come together at least a couple of times during the Challenge to do what Christ says. Check out the appendix "Community Rally Ideas" for suggestions.

Finally, we want to encourage you as a leader to get fully immersed in the Challenge yourself. If you want your people to invest in it and grow, it's important for you to model it.

WWW.REDLITTERCHALLENGE.COM

WHO IS

THE RED LETTER CHALLENGE FOR?

As the great NBA theologian Allen Iverson once said in a press conference,

"I mean listen, we're sitting here talking about practice, not a game, not a game, not a game, but we're talking about practice."¹

Okay, so maybe he's not a theologian, but the former NBA star points to a reality that is true for nearly everybody – practice isn't as much fun as the game!

Too many people think that to follow Jesus Christ, they have to wait on the sidelines until they have all of their life in order. They believe they have to wait until they understand the Bible and have read through the entire thing before they can do what He says to do.

I believe **the time to do what Jesus is asking is today**. This Challenge is for you, whether you have been firm in your faith for decades, you've just come to faith in Jesus Christ, or you're wrestling with this whole God thing for the first time.

No matter where you're starting, **doing the words of Jesus will help you**

find the life you were made for. I believe few things stretch our faith more than actually getting involved and doing the things God is asking us to do. When we feel unequipped and unprepared (which you will feel at times in this Challenge), God will use those moments to give, shape, and form your faith.

This Challenge is for anybody and everybody. Young and old. Men and women. Churched and unchurched. New Christian, life-long Christian, non-Christian. It's for anybody who's looking for something more in life.

CHALLENGE EXTENDED!

DAY 1 BEING

In this Challenge, you will be asked to do many things. But before you can do them, it's important to know why you're doing them – and who you are doing them for. I believe **truly following Jesus means both being with Jesus and doing the things He asks.**

Some people are better at being. They like the whole idea of spending time with God, but they never do anything.

If I tell my son, "Go clean your room," he's not going to come back a couple hours later and say, "Hey dad, I memorized what you said. You said, 'Go, clean your room.'" And he's not going to say, "Dad, I know 'Go clean your room' in Greek. *Pao Katharos sas domatio.*" At this point I'd be impressed, but that's not going to fly! And he's not going to say, "My friends and I are going to gather and study what it would look like if I went and cleaned my room." No, none of that's going to work. So why do we think this is going to work with Jesus?²

Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord,' and not do what I tell you to do?" Words without action were never acceptable to Jesus. Faith without action is dead.

On the flip side, there are others (like me!), who enjoy doing. We think just being is boring. We want to get things done! But if we don't spend time being, our doing won't be as productive. If we don't spend the time resting

in God and learning from Him, we'll quickly burn out and our activity will become more about us than about Christ.

I remember when I was dating my wife Allison. We went on a trip with her family to the Chicago Science Museum. Allison warned me her dad likes to take 20-minute naps every day, no matter what. Sure enough, he found a bench near one of the displays and curled up and he was out. His eyes were closed, he was snoring, there was drool dripping from his mouth onto the floor. (Okay, I might be exaggerating that last part.)

At this point in my relationship with Allison I was still trying to make a good impression on her family. Apparently they were all used to their dad sleeping in random places, but I was not, so I volunteered to stay with him. People walked by and gave him weird looks, and then they would look at me. I, of course, acted like I didn't know the man. It was very awkward, but right at 20 minutes, he popped up, awake, and I acted like everything was great. I thought it was crazy.

But apparently there is some scientific evidence that says those who take naps during the day can actually be more productive. It doesn't seem like slowing down in the middle of productive work hours would be helpful, but these naps re-energize them so they can get more done.

Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." Many of us don't know how to just be. We know how to do. But we struggle with the being.

Before we do what Christ asks us to do, we need to be with Him. That's

what this first week is all about: Spending time with God. So in our “being” week we will explore what are called spiritual disciplines. These spiritual disciplines are good habits that allow you to more closely connect to Jesus Christ. These disciplines have been practiced for centuries by those who follow Jesus.

The healthiest way to follow Christ and seek Him first is for our doing to flow out of our being. **Our doing flows out of who we are and who we become when we spend time with Christ.**

Here’s how I see this playing out in my life:

- ➡ When I spend my time with Christ, I can’t wait to start doing what He says.
- ➡ When I come to church and worship Christ, it gives me the fuel I need to keep going in life.
- ➡ When I read the Bible, it doesn’t take long for it to manifest itself in me and pretty soon it becomes like a fire shut up in my bones that I cannot contain. I just gotta share it!
- ➡ When I pray, there’s a peace that comes over me. I can’t even explain it.

Jesus said many things when it comes to being with Him. Over the first full week of the Challenge, you’ll learn different ways in which you can be with Jesus.

OUR DOING
FLOWS OUT OF
WHO WE ARE
AND WHO WE
BECOME WHEN
WE SPEND TIME
WITH CHRIST.

DAY 2 FORGIVING

Couches typically look really nice on the outside. But have you ever lifted up the cushions?

Before you do, take a moment to prepare your heart and soul for the horrors you are about to experience. In fact, you may even want to put on a hazmat suit! If you're like our family, you're going to find M&M's, quesadillas, pizza crusts, potato chips, Lego pieces, and possibly the Zika virus. It's all under there.

On the surface the couch looks great. In fact, we've even had people come over and sit on our couch.³ It looks fine on the surface, but deep down in the cracks is lots of junk.

Our lives are like this. **On the surface many of us look great, but on the inside we are a mess.** We put the highlight pictures of ourselves on social media so everybody thinks everything is great. We look amazing online, so we think we've fooled everybody into thinking we have no major problems in our lives.

We even do this at church. We walk in and act like we're politicians: hugging people, kissing babies, and shaking hands. We try to make everything look flawless, but underneath there's a bunch of stuff we are not so proud of. And sometimes other people can be intimidated because they assume they

must be the only ones with a mess under their couch.

The reality is that deep inside each one of us there is a great deal of hurt. All of us carry that around. We're hurting, we're experiencing pain, and many of us are not free because we're held captive to the past. It's like an old couch that we can't get rid of - we keep encountering the mess.

But God doesn't want you stuck in the past, because **if you can't let go of the past you'll never be able to move into the future.** He has taken your mess and nailed it to the cross so you don't have to keep beating yourself up about it. He wants you to experience His grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says it perfectly: "For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."

In every world religion besides Christianity, you have to do something to have "salvation" or "eternal life." And many of those religions are growing more quickly than Christianity, because they make more sense. Grace is free! We don't deserve grace! So it's difficult to accept.

Brennan Manning says, *"Put bluntly, the American church today accepts grace in theory but denies it in practice. We say we believe that the fundamental structure of reality is grace, not works--but our lives refute our faith. By and large, the gospel of grace is neither proclaimed, understood, nor lived."*⁴

He goes on to say, *“Jesus comes not for the super-spiritual but for the wobbly and the weak-kneed who know they don't have it all together, and who are not too proud to accept the handout of amazing grace. As we glance up, we are astonished to find the eyes of Jesus open with wonder, deep with understanding, and gentle with compassion. This is the God of the gospel of grace.”*⁵

My grandpa once talked to a woman in her nineties who had only a couple of weeks to live. She said, “I’ve been in church my whole life. I’ve served on every committee. But I don’t know if I’ve done enough good things to enter into heaven. I don’t know where I’m going when I die.” My grandpa was able to explain to her that she is not saved by what she has done, but by what God has already done. He has already forgiven her of her sins and she can be confident of her salvation.

How sad that a woman can hear all the “right” words and be in all the “right” places for over nine decades and still never truly receive God’s forgiveness. I hope that when my grandpa talked to her, she finally felt confidence and assurance in God’s grace. Grace assures you that everything has been taken care of. **There is no sin too big that God did not die for on the cross.**

All of us are in desperate need of God’s grace. The second full week of our 40-day Challenge will focus on receiving God’s forgiveness and learning how to forgive other people.

THERE IS NO
SIN TOO BIG
THAT GOD
DID NOT DIE
FOR ON THE
CROSS.

DAY 3 SERVING

Yesterday we looked at Ephesians 2:8-9 which says we are saved by God's grace and not by our own works. So if my future has already been taken care of, what is the point of good works? The very next verse says this:

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

It's no coincidence that the apostle Paul wrote this verse after the previous grace-filled verses. There's a flow to this: once you receive God's grace, you can't help but want to do good. If you are filled with gratitude because someone has helped you, you want to repay that person. It's the same with us and God.

Second Kings 4 is the story of a wealthy Shunammite woman. She made a guest room in her house for the great prophet Elisha. And so one day he says to her, "You have gone to all this trouble. Now what can be done for you?"⁶ What I love about this story is she didn't build the room so Elisha would one day do something for her. And Elisha didn't ask her what he could do for her because he had to. They both genuinely wanted to serve the other person.

Far too many people come into a relationship with Jesus just wanting to get more from Him. I get really frustrated when preachers twist the true

Gospel and replace it with a prosperity Gospel that says if you are following Him, God will bless you and you will live a prosperous life. You give this much money and God will take care of your debt, or you do something for someone else and next time you'll get the perfect parking spot.

We don't serve God in order to get more from Him. We've already received Jesus. He is the prize. He is the great reward! We serve God because He first served us.

However, while the motivation behind serving God is not to get more from Him, we always do!

"Just as Elisha actively looked for ways to bless the Shunammite woman, God is eager to bless us. Isn't that a perspective-changing, paradigm-shifting way to look at God? I think most of us imagine that God looks for ways to get us. But what if God is actually dreaming about how He wants to bless you and move on your behalf?"⁷

Our gratitude for what God has done leads us to serve Him. We don't serve God because we have to or because it's how we earn our salvation. We serve God because of everything He's done for us, and for this reason:

While serving others won't save you, it just may help save someone else. Only the Holy Spirit can save someone, but the Holy Spirit lives inside all those who believe in Him. That means He can use someone like you to help save someone else. **You are more powerful than you realize!**

I understand that not everyone in this Challenge is on the same spiritual level. And that's okay. Some of you are doing this Challenge because you feel like you "should." But I hope that over the course of these forty days you realize just how good our God is and how much He's done for you, and your "have to" attitude becomes a "want to."

Jesus had a heart of service. When we serve, we reflect who our God is. A big piece of this 40-day Challenge is changing people's perceptions of Christ-followers. When we serve, when we care for orphans and widows, when we feed the hungry, when we clothe the naked, when we let our lights shine before others, people notice and are drawn to us.

1 Peter 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Many times we focus on having the right answers, but before you can give an answer, a question must be asked. We must live our lives so that others will ask, "What is different about that person? Why do they care so much? Why do they serve so much?" And when they ask us, we can tell them we serve because Jesus first served us.

During the third full week of this Challenge, you will begin to serve. You will learn who God calls you to serve and how He calls you to serve.

WHILE SERVING
OTHERS WON'T
SAVE YOU, IT
MAY HELP SAVE
SOMEONE ELSE.

DAY 4 GIVING

Jesus talked a lot about giving. In fact, Jesus talked more about money than He talked about love, heaven, or hell. He talked about money more than any other topic except the Kingdom of God.⁸

Why? Because people desperately need wisdom when it comes to their finances. Many of us are living paycheck to paycheck and drowning under debt. Money is the one thing people argue about most in their marriages. No matter who you are, saving, giving, and managing money is probably a challenge.

So let's start with this statement. You are rich.

*Andy Stanley says, "It's funny, rich people are in denial. And normally we are not in denial about things we know. For instance, tall people admit they're tall. Short people admit they are short. Athletic people admit they're athletic. Artsy people admit they're artsy. And they don't mind telling you that...their car is a mess, their room is a mess, their life is a mess, and they are as happy as can be. Introverts don't even mind telling you they are introverts, and extroverts can't wait to tell you they are extroverts. Like they really need to tell you. But when it comes to rich people, they won't admit it, they live in denial."*⁹

According to statistics, if you make \$40,000 a year you are in the top 4% in the world, and if you make over \$48,000 a year, you are in the top 1% of earners in the world. We enjoy a quality of life that very few in the history of the world have ever experienced. Our biggest concern is not starvation, but obesity!

However, the more Americans make, the less they give away.

When Allison and I first got married, our apartment was inside a home built around 1900. This apartment only had one very small closet. At this time in history a man probably had one suit and one or two nice shirts. He had some jeans and a couple casual shirts, maybe two pairs of shoes, and that was about it. Ladies, I have no idea what you wore but evidently it would fit in the closet next to those few things. One little closet.

Today it's very different. Our homes have closets in almost every room.

Some have walk-in closets. Some have walk-around closets! And some of us still say we have nothing to wear! Not only that, many of us have so much in our closets that it spills into the garage...and then to clear out our garage we have to store our extra stuff someplace else. I've heard that the storage industry, which barely existed 25 years ago, is now larger than the music industry in our country. There are 52,000 storage facilities worldwide, and 46,000 of those are in the USA. We love our stuff! We are rich. And yet we experience financial problems and stress like never before.

Our priorities have gotten out of whack. When we care more about the stuff we've accumulated than helping out those in need, when we care more about the money we're making than spending time with our family, and when we look to the money in our bank accounts instead of looking to God for our security, we need to totally change our relationship to money.

In the fourth full week of this Challenge, we will see that Jesus challenges His followers to be generous. The more I read the words of Jesus, the more **I'm convinced it's impossible to be a stingy Christian.** We cannot follow Jesus well and at the same time ignore his teaching on money. **If you are truly following Jesus, you are generous.**

And just as we serve out of a response to God, we give because God gave to us. The most famous verse in the Bible is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he **gave** his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." God showed His love for us by giving His Son. Jesus showed His love for us by giving up His life. When we give, we reflect the heart and character of our God. The week of giving will definitely challenge you because our "normal" approach to finances is not working. Let's try doing what Jesus asks of us!

I'M CONVINCED
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE
TO BE A STINGY
CHRISTIAN.

DAY 5 GOING

When Jesus began His ministry, He moved with an incredible sense of urgency. In the Gospel of Mark, the words “straight away” or “immediately” are used more than forty times. **If Jesus moved with a sense of urgency, then I want to move with a sense of urgency.**

But it’s hard to go full-speed for God. We are naturally wired to want to be in control of everything and to go at a comfortable pace. When we decide to follow Jesus, we surrender our need to be in control. It can certainly be scary, but it can also be rewarding, exciting, and adventurous.

Gary Haugen, founder and leader of International Justice Mission, wrote a book called *Just Courage*. In this book, he described something that happened when he was 10 years old that still haunts him today. He describes a day when he was climbing Mount Rainier with his dad and his brothers. He was the littlest, so the climb was difficult for him.

On this particular day, Gary's family wanted to reach Camp Muir, but Gary looked at the huge sign full of warnings for the trail ahead and asked to stay at the visitor’s center while they climbed.

His dad agreed, so Gary stayed at the center and explored every corner. But as the day went on, this huge area started to feel rather small. And watching the informational video for the sixth or seventh time wasn’t as interesting.

He began to feel rather bored, and sleepy, and stuck.

After the longest afternoon of his life, his dad and brothers finally came back. They were wet from the snow, famished, dehydrated, and nursing scrapes from the rock and ice, but on the long drive home they had stories about an unforgettable day with their dad on a great mountain. Gary says he realized "I went on the trip and missed the adventure."

Gary chose what was easy. It seemed like a fine decision at the time, but in the end it was rather boring. His dad and brothers chose what was hard and had stories, memories, and scrapes they'll always remember!¹⁰

Don't go on the trip and miss the adventure. Many of us want to follow Jesus only when it's easy and safe. The moment it gets hard, we tend to lose faith and question God. But safe and easy makes for a boring story. In his book *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*, Donald Miller wrote, *"If you watched a movie about a guy who wanted a Volvo and worked for years to get it, you wouldn't cry at the end when he drove off the lot, testing the windshield wipers. You wouldn't tell your friends you saw a beautiful movie or go home and put a record on to think about the story you'd seen. The truth is, you wouldn't remember that movie a week later, except that you'd feel robbed and want your money back. Nobody cries at the end of a movie about a guy who wants a Volvo.*

But we spend years actually living those stories, and expect our lives to feel meaningful. The truth is, if what we choose to do with our lives won't make

*a story meaningful, it won't make a life meaningful either."*¹¹

If you recognized your life was telling a bad story, would you change it? As we start this Challenge, remember you are telling a story. You have the opportunity to tell the story of Jesus by what you do and say during this Challenge. And even though it's not always going to be easy, I guarantee that if you do this Challenge and live by Christ's words, you will be living a story worth telling.

This final week of the Challenge will be tough. God will call you to stretch outside of your comfort zone. On those days, the easy and safe thing would be leaving the Challenge without finishing. But don't go on the trip and miss the adventure!

When God says, "Go," He will always go with you. He will never leave you or forsake you. **When God calls you to go somewhere, you never go alone.** Jesus offers us a way of life filled with adventure, mission, and purpose. Are you ready? Buckle up, the Challenge starts now!

5 / 40



DAYS

6-12

OF THE  40 DAY

CHALLENGE

WEEK OF

BEING



"COME TO ME, ALL WHO ARE
WEARY AND BURDENED,
AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST."

MATTHEW 11:28

DAY 6

ABIDE IN MY WORD
JOHN 8:31

What if I told you God could speak to you at any moment? Sometimes people say, "I just keep waiting to hear God's voice, and I'm getting nothing." **If there was a way to hear from God right now, would you do it?** Of course you would! You would probably do whatever it takes to hear directly from God! Well, the Bible is the book that contains God's words. The Bible is the place where God reveals Himself to you. Yet often the same people who claim to love God so much and who say they want to hear from Him often steer clear of reading the Bible. As a result, they miss out on opportunities to hear from God.

LifeWay Research surveyed more than 2,900 Protestant churchgoers and found that while 90 percent "desire to please and honor Jesus in all I do," only 19 percent personally read the Bible every day.¹² 19 percent. That's pathetic.

Maybe you are a part of the 19 percent who reads the Bible, and if you are, I want to encourage you to keep reading as often as you can. But if the numbers are accurate, that means more than four out of every five people who are going through this Challenge don't regularly read the Bible. How can we truly expect to make an impact for Jesus Christ if we don't even invest some time into reading what He said and growing in our knowledge of who He is?

Listen, I'm not perfect. There are days I fail. My job as a pastor certainly helps keep me in the Bible on a regular basis, but that doesn't mean I'm always learning and growing from God's Word. So this is something even I struggle with at times.

The full quote from Jesus is found in John 8:31-32: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The word "abide" can mean to dwell or reside. Jesus essentially tells us to live in His Word. He wants us to make the Bible, His words, a part of our life. We are to read, mark, and inwardly digest them. They are to become such a part of us that we can't imagine what our lives were like before we knew the Bible. The Word of God is supposed to go with us wherever we go!

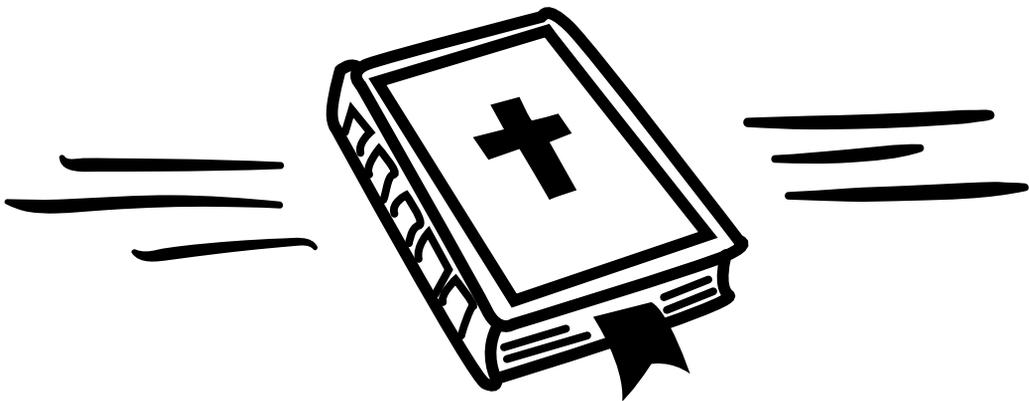
In fact, in the Old Testament, God actually told Ezekiel to eat the Scripture. Ezekiel 3:3 says, "'Feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.' Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey." God wanted Ezekiel to consume these words so these words would literally take life inside of him. The same is true of us today. God wants us to be reading and studying the Bible so much that the Bible becomes a part of us. His words have the power to actually change us and move us. That's what this Challenge is all about: bringing Jesus' words to life today!

The Bible is the one true story of life. The Bible reveals the one true God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It's in the words of the Holy Bible that we see that through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection we are offered grace, forgiveness, freedom, and new life! Because of this

new life, we can't help but want to make a difference and point people to know more about our amazing God. And where do we point them to find out more about God? To the Bible!

There is perhaps no greater spiritual discipline than reading God's Word, because whenever you open its pages, it always accomplishes something. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Every time you spend time in Scripture, you are being trained, corrected, and equipped. You are always hearing from God!

We'll be doing a lot of good works in this Challenge. The Word of God will prepare us for these good works, because, after all, our doing flows out of our being with Christ.



THE BIBLE
IS THE ONE
TRUE STORY
OF LIFE.

In our Bible reading for today, God calls Ezekiel to be a prophet and speak difficult but true words to the nation of Israel. God is giving the words to Ezekiel to proclaim to the Israelites. Like Ezekiel, we are called to consume God's Word and then share those words and the Gospel message with the rest of the world.

EZEKIEL 2:7-3:4

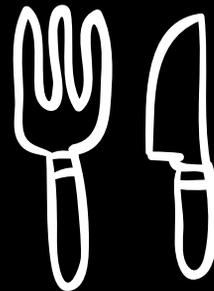
7 You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. 8 But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you."

9 Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, 10 which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.

3:1 And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel." 2 So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

3 Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

4 He then said to me: "Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them.



OPEN THE BIBLE TODAY AND HEAR FROM GOD.

If you haven't ever read the Bible, I would recommend starting in the book of John. John is the 4th book of the New Testament and tells the story of Jesus in a way that helps people understand who He is.

This Challenge today, is a great discipline to practice every day for the rest of the Challenge and thereafter. If you are wondering where to start or how to read the Bible effectively, a great place to start is by downloading the YouVersion Bible App or searching online for a daily Bible reading plan.

6/40

DAYS
13-19
OF THE  40 DAY
CHALLENGE

WEEK OF

FORG

IVING



"BE KIND AND COMPASSIONATE
TO ONE ANOTHER, FORGIVING
EACH OTHER, JUST AS IN CHRIST
GOD FORGAVE YOU."

EPHESIANS 4:32

DAY 13

REPENT AND BELIEVE
THE GOOD NEWS
MARK 1:15

The very first thing Jesus says to begin His ministry is “Repent and believe the good news.” Before Jesus serves, teaches, preaches, or heals He first invites people to receive the grace He has won for all of them. And before we start to forgive others and begin serving, giving, and going, we need to understand the good news of Jesus Christ.

I had a really rough week earlier this year. I was driving home with my kids and all of a sudden I saw the flashing lights from a motorcycle behind me. There are never cops in my neighborhood, so this was quite a shock! I pulled over and the cop asked for my license and registration. It was dark and late, and I was hoping the cop would see my kids and realize that I needed to get home and get them in bed. But no. He gave me a speeding ticket and mentioned he took it down from 12 above the speed limit to 10. I said thanks, but in my heart I was not grateful one bit.

The next morning, I was driving our other car to work and, wouldn't you know it, I got pulled over again in my neighborhood – by the same cop! I rolled down the window and he said, “You again?” And I said, “Good to see you again, officer!” Apparently I didn't fully stop at a stop sign. He asked where I was rushing off to and what I was doing. I told him I was a pastor and he said, “You realize I gave you some grace yesterday, right?” I said, “Yes,” but in my heart I was thinking, “Officer, I don't think you understand what grace is. Grace is a free gift given to someone who doesn't deserve

it, not a partial gift.” He went back to his car and I began praying, “Please God, not another ticket. I really don’t want to tell my wife I got two tickets in less than ten hours.” Turns out my prayer was answered because I was given two tickets, one for running a stop sign and one for not having an active registration! In a ten-hour period I was given three tickets. I was really bummed.

I reached out to one of my friends who is a lawyer. I told him I was guilty but it was going to cost a lot of money and I also didn’t want all those points on my record. He said, “Give me the tickets and I’ll take care of them.” I asked him what I needed to do. He said, “Nothing, I’ll take care of them for you.” I didn’t ask any questions and didn’t quite understand the process. How are you going to wipe away my tickets when I know I was at fault? He encouraged me to stop asking questions and just give him the tickets. Two months later, the day of my court date, he told me it had all been taken care of. Not guilty. No fine. Done. The officer didn’t even show up. I was guilty, and yet I was pardoned!

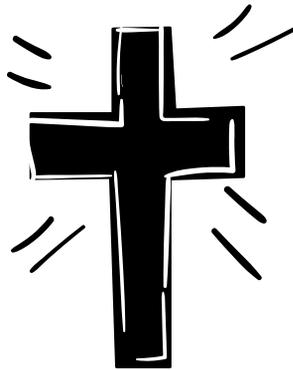
This is a picture of God’s grace for us. **We are all guilty – that includes you.** The apostle Paul says in Romans 3:10 that “There is no one righteous, not even one.” Sometimes we don’t really believe that our sin is that big of a deal, but we have all sinned.

On the other hand, others of us wallow in our mistakes and think we are beyond forgiveness. **Yet no matter how serious, big, or awful your sin is, God’s grace extends to cover it.**

God, who is our Judge, says in spite of your faithlessness, He will be faithful. In spite of our addiction, Jesus came to set us free. In spite of the chaos and turmoil of our circumstances He came to bring us peace. And like a judge, He has the power to overrule our objections. When our hearts object and say we could never be forgiven, God says, "Objection overruled," because the blood of His Son Jesus is powerful enough, pure enough, and strong enough to cover all of your sins.

We are guilty, and yet through Christ's grace we are free. That freedom then influences the way we live the rest of our lives!

Before we can forgive others, we first need to spend a couple of days realizing that we personally need Christ's forgiveness as much as anyone else. Thank you, Jesus, for the grace that you offer to us all!



NO MATTER
HOW SERIOUS,
BIG, OR AWFUL
YOUR SIN IS,
GOD'S GRACE
EXTENDS TO
COVER IT.

This story reminds us that no one is outside the reach of Jesus Christ! Saul was an influential politician that approved of the murders of many Jesus-followers. He would be the least likely of candidates to receive God's grace. But on the Damascus Road, as Saul was on the way to persecute more Christians, Jesus caused him to go blind and this conversation ensued:

ACTS 9:4-9, 15-19

4 Paul fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

God then speaks to one of His prophets named Ananias who lives in Damascus. He tells him

to go pray for Saul and to restore His sight. Ananias is confused, because of all that he had heard about Saul.

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

AS WE START OUR WEEK OF FORGIVENESS WE WANT TO FOLLOW JESUS' EXACT WORDS: REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.

To repent means that we are truly sorry and ready to turn away from our sin. As we repent and acknowledge that we are sinners, we also receive and believe the good news that Jesus Christ has grace for us!

Repentance is not a one-time prayer. It's an everyday practice. If you are ready to repent and be forgiven, say this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Your Name. Amen.

If that was the first time you ever said that prayer, please email us at hello@redletterchallenge.com and let us know. We'd love to send you some FREE online resources!

DAYS
20-26
OF THE  40 DAY
CHALLENGE

WEEK OF

SEER

VING



"FOR WE ARE GOD'S HANDIWORK,
CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS TO DO
GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED
IN ADVANCE FOR US TO DO."

EPHESIANS 2:10

DAY 26

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE
BEFORE OTHERS
MATTHEW 5:16

It's important for us to not just talk about doing good things and meeting needs in the community, but to actually do them. It's how we show the rest of the world who God is! Take a look at what Jesus says in Matthew 5:13-16:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

In *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Timothy Keller makes the following observation about salt:

"The job of salt was to make something taste good. I don't know about you, but I can't stand corn on the cob without salt on it. When I have eaten a piece of corn on the cob that I really like, I put it down, and what do I say? 'That was great salt.' No, I say, 'That was great corn on the cob.' Why? Because the job of the salt is not to make you think how great the salt is, but how great the thing is with which it's involved."³⁰

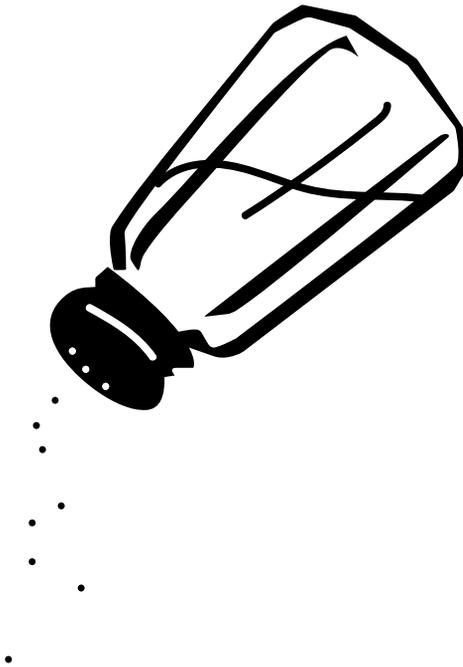
Jesus is calling you salt. As salt, our job is to go out and show people how great our God is. Every time I preach, the success of the sermon is not based on what people think of me. It's based on if I preached about Jesus and how He is our hero. If I preach and someone walks away from the sermon and all they can say about it was, "That pastor was smart," or "That pastor was funny," then I haven't done my job. My job is to point people to Jesus and give all glory to Him, not to myself. That's what salt does.

For this Challenge, your job as salt of the earth is to point people to God and show them how great our God is. That's really what it means for us to let our lights shine as well. Don't keep this light to yourself! By shining your light and being salt (in other words, by doing good works and meeting needs in the community) you show who God is to the rest of the world and ultimately fulfill what God has wanted all along for His people! God has wanted us to represent Him to the rest of the world from the beginning! This is what He wanted to do with the Israelites in the Old Testament; this is what He wanted for His disciples; and this is what He calls us, as His followers who make up the church, to do today. The amazing thing is that Jesus actually says that someone can see the good deeds we do and glorify God because of us! That's incredible!

However, I want to caution you on something I see quite often. It seems obvious but I need to point it out. I've seen a lot of Christians who shine their lights really bright in places that are already pretty well lit. In other words, I've seen a lot of people who believe in Jesus, do good works, and say all the right things about God in places where there are already many other Christians. It's easy to shine your light and serve in church or in a

Christian small group; it's very hard to shine your light in dark places or places where there are no Christians or where your viewpoints and opinions are not the majority. God calls us to shine our light not around other Christians, but especially in places where there is darkness.

It's amazing to think that **through what we do and the way we live, we can actually point people to a real relationship with God.** We may never know what kind of impact we have made in somebody else's life, but we will continue to be faithful in serving Him and giving Him the glory.



THROUGH WHAT
WE DO AND THE
WAY WE LIVE, WE
CAN ACTUALLY
POINT PEOPLE
TO A REAL
RELATIONSHIP
WITH GOD.

Notice how similar these sections are to the section we read above in the devotion. God's plan from the beginning with the Israelites, the disciples of Jesus, and the church has always been that we would represent Him to the rest of the world by living a life of obedience and godliness.



EXODUS 19:3-6

3 Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

1 PETER 2:9-12

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

SERVE GOD TODAY IN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING WAYS

- 1 Organize a servant event with a local non-profit
- 2 Volunteer at a food pantry or soup kitchen
- 3 Volunteer with your local Habitat for Humanity
- 4 Clean a neighbor's yard
- 5 Visit an elderly person
- 6 Encourage someone who is sick

26/40

DAYS
27-33
OF THE  40 DAY
CHALLENGE

WEEK OF

GIVING



"IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE
THAN TO RECEIVE."

ACTS 20:35

DAY 33

IT IS BETTER TO GIVE
THAN RECEIVE
ACTS 20:35

Which is really better: to give or to receive?

I'll be honest with you; when I was younger I thought it was much better to get things than to give them. At Christmas, I loved getting things and really didn't care what others got. But now, in my old age, my thinking has changed. Now I get much more satisfaction in giving a gift than in receiving one. When I buy a gift for someone I truly care about, it's so hard to keep it a secret!

My wife and I got married in 2004 and in December of that year we moved away from Wisconsin to Missouri, leaving many friends we had met in college. In Missouri we had no real friends and we were both several hundred miles away from our families. Although we were far from family, I still remembered the traditions my family had around holidays. In our family, we stayed up late on Christmas Eve and opened gifts after my dad got home from all of the Christmas Eve services. Because he was pastor of a large church, there were multiple worship services and the last one didn't start until 11PM, so dad didn't get home until about one in the morning. Then we would open presents! I loved and cherished those moments.

So that Christmas in Missouri I bought my wife a pair of shoes I knew she really wanted and she bought me a golf club that I really wanted. We were both so excited to give each other the gifts we bought. And since we

weren't constricted to our old traditions anymore, we decided we couldn't wait any longer, and our first Christmas together we opened our gifts for each other on December 11th! The next year we did a little better; we made it until December 13th. Now we have kids and have to be responsible adults, so we're back to a normal Christmas Eve gift opening!

But here's the point in all of this: when you have a good gift for someone you care about, you can't wait to give it away.

Jordan Grafman actually asked the question,

"Is it better to give or to receive?" According to an article on Sharpbrains.com, "He asked nineteen fit volunteers to participate in a computer game while having their brains scanned by an fMRI. An fMRI is a machine that scans the brain that measures increased blood flow to the different blood vessels that accompany brain usage. And through scanning the brain, they were actually able to tell in this game whether people got more excited about giving or receiving a gift. The way the game was played was it gave out cash rewards for doing well and offered the contestants a chance to either receive the reward or to donate and to give the reward to someone else. The team of scientists found that giving a present to another being actually feels better than receiving a gift from one."⁴⁰

We have all been given the most amazing gift in the entire world by receiving the grace of Jesus Christ in our life. As amazing as it is to receive this gift, it is even better when we can give that gift to others. Any time I've

ever gotten a gift I really like, I love to tell others about it. I'm sure you are the same way, too, yet so often we fail to give people this greatest gift!

The best thing you can do with a good gift is rip it open, enjoy it, and share it with others. I hope you think about this for your life. Are you sharing the greatest gift you've ever been given with someone else right now? If not, why not? If you are, isn't it amazing?



THE BEST THING
YOU CAN DO
WITH A GOOD
GIFT IS RIP IT
OPEN, ENJOY IT,
AND SHARE IT
WITH OTHERS.

The churches in Macedonia were excited to give even in the midst of their poverty. Pay special attention to the last verse; this is where all of our generosity stems from.

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1–10

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. 5 And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. 6 So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7 But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.



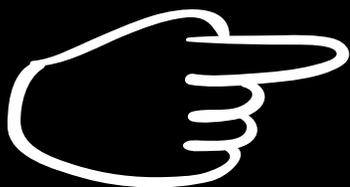
GIVE A GREAT GIFT TO
A WORTHY PERSON OR
CHARITY TODAY!

33/40

DAYS
34-40
OF THE  40 DAY
CHALLENGE

WEEK OF

GOING



"THEREFORE GO AND
MAKE DISCIPLES
OF ALL NATIONS."

MATTHEW 28:19A

DAY 38

GO INTO ALL THE WORLD AND
PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY
CREATURE
MARK 16:15

This is a pretty intimidating quote. For many of us, the Red Letter Challenge has gotten harder as it has gone on and now it's really ramping up! For some people, this is where they will really need God's presence to go with them, because they are afraid of telling someone about Jesus. They think, "I'll do all the other things, I'll forgive, I'll serve, I'll be generous, but don't make me open my mouth!"

St. Francis of Assisi once said, "Preach the Gospel, and if necessary, use words." People love this quote. And I think it's great because it emphasizes that our actions are very important when it comes to living out our faith. But I think far too many people look at this quote and use it as an excuse to never speak.

There is a time to show people who Jesus is through our actions, but there is absolutely a time to speak as well. It's not an either/or, it's a both/and. I need to both show people who God is through my actions and I need to speak the Gospel.

We've lost our boldness when it comes to speaking about God. Many of us would rather do anything else. But why is that? If God has truly died on the cross for you and paid the price that you deserved to pay, if He has literally rescued you from hell, wouldn't you want to share that good news with others?

My denomination came up with a long study of why church attendance, baptisms, and membership in our denomination is on a decline. The number

My denomination came up with a long study of why church attendance, baptisms, and membership in our denomination is on a decline. The number one answer they came up with is that we are having fewer children. So even though the population is increasing, we've blamed our denominational decline on the birthrate?! The solution is to have more children? I found this ridiculous. We would rather raise a child from birth than actually go out there and tell somebody about Jesus!

I struggle with this because many times throughout Scripture God commands His people to proclaim who He is. Not only that, but He sends us with His Holy Spirit so we can have confidence. We don't have to go out with fear and timidity, but instead we operate from a position of power and strength.

I know it's not easy to speak in public or tell someone about Jesus. It's hard to talk in front of others. As a child, I really struggled with speaking in public. I always got so nervous. Because my last name was at the end of the alphabet, I was usually last and so I had even more time to worry. I remember silently rooting for other people to do miserably in their speeches just so mine wouldn't be as bad as everyone else's. I was terrified.

But **God can turn your fear into confidence.**

After enough speeches and sermons, I began to get confidence in this area. Now I love to speak in public. I love to preach. I love to tell people about Jesus. It's what I live for. In fact, a couple of years ago, I decided I was going to try to break a Guinness World Record for the longest speech of all time. I wanted to preach all the way through the Bible and help people understand God's Word better and, at the same time, use the event as a fundraiser for a new non-profit in our area to build a recovery home for men. 53 hours and 18 minutes later I was a Guinness World Record holder and am literally the longest-winded preacher of all time!

There were many times I didn't know what to say, but God came through in a mighty way. There were Bible verses I didn't know I had memorized that God gave me at three in the morning. That particular weekend was living proof for me that I just have to be obedient and show up and God will take care of the rest. He will speak when I don't know what to say.

When I do force myself to be uncomfortable, I experience God in ways I otherwise would have missed. He has always shown up. He never leaves you or forsakes you. There are far too many people out there who don't know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Increasing our birthrate is fine, but there are many people who are already here, already dying and going to hell. It is our job to both show and tell them who Jesus Christ is. Let's not wait. The stakes are too high.

GOD CAN TURN
YOUR FEAR INTO
CONFIDENCE.

God gave the prophet Ezekiel a vision and led him to a valley of dry bones. In this vision, he is surrounded by dry, dead, decomposing bodies. Talk about a tough crowd! This vision shows us that the Word of the Lord is effective. He can make dead bones live again and He can make spiritually dead people live again.

EZEKIEL 37:1–10

The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

4 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! 5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

WRITE DOWN FIVE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE WHO DO NOT HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST.

Talk to one of those five today about your testimony. Make a plan over the next month to speak with the other four. This should go without saying, but make sure when you talk with them that you are also there to listen to them about anything they may be going through.

38/40

DAY 41 AND ON

Now that you have completed the Challenge, how did it go? If you are like me, you were probably stronger in some areas than others. I hope over the past 40 days you have learned more about God and what He asks of His followers. You can repeat the Challenge as often as you'd like and compare how it went each time. The Challenge is for a lifetime, because **when we follow Jesus and His words, we find the life we were made for.**

I encourage you to continue pursuing the five main principles of this Challenge: Being, Forgiving, Serving, Giving, and Going. Following Jesus well is a combination of these five principles. I also encourage you to get connected with a local church and a small group of like-minded Jesus-followers. It is not always easy to follow Jesus, and you will need the support and encouragement from others to keep going. Not only that, but others will need your support and encouragement as well!

Let me leave you with this blessing:



MAY YOU PURSUE JESUS
WITH ALL YOUR HEART, MAY
GOD USE YOU TO DO MIGHTY
THINGS FOR HIS KINGDOM,
AND AFTER ALL IS SAID AND
DONE IN THIS WORLD, MAY
YOU HEAR GOD SAY TO YOU,
“WELL DONE, MY GOOD AND
FAITHFUL SERVANT.”

SELF-REFLECTION

Following Jesus is the greatest opportunity we will ever have, and it's also something we constantly want to strive to get better at. So how'd you do? Give yourself an honest assessment for each of the five main principles by rating yourself on a scale of 1-10, 1 being the worst, 10 being the best.

Being

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Forgiving

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Serving

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Giving

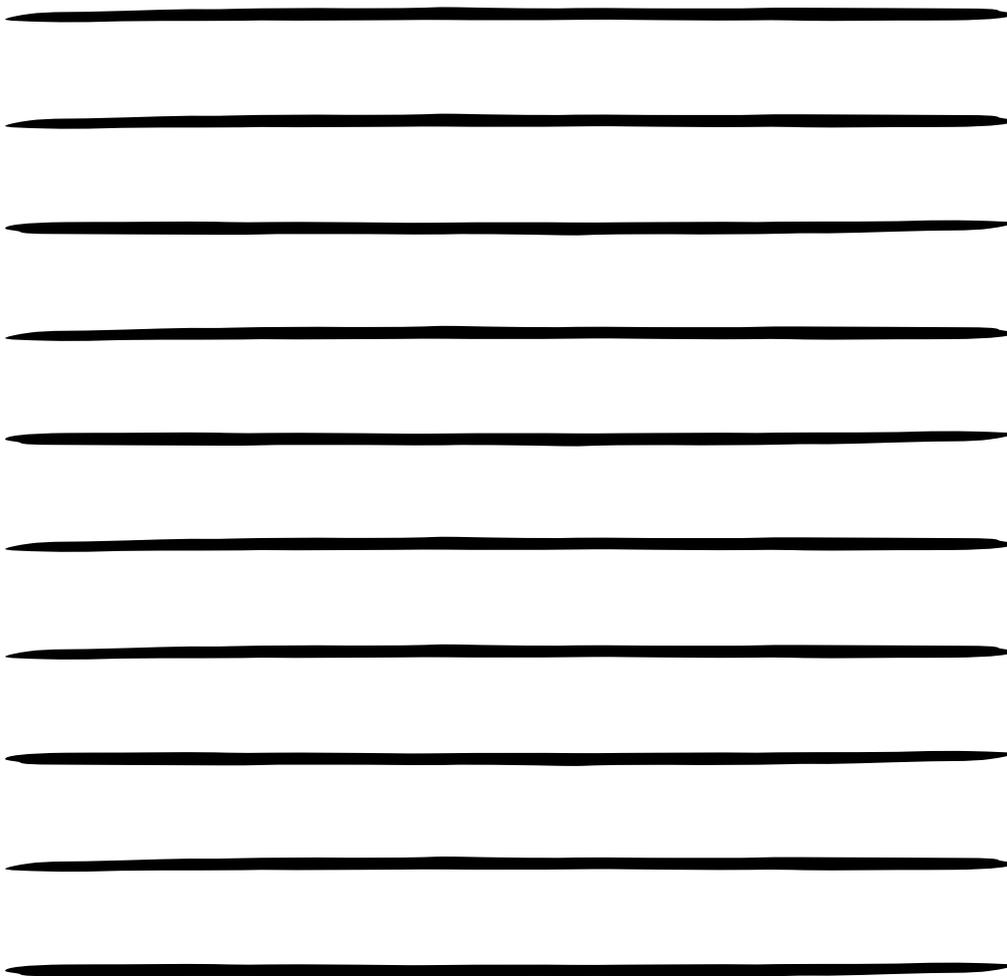
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

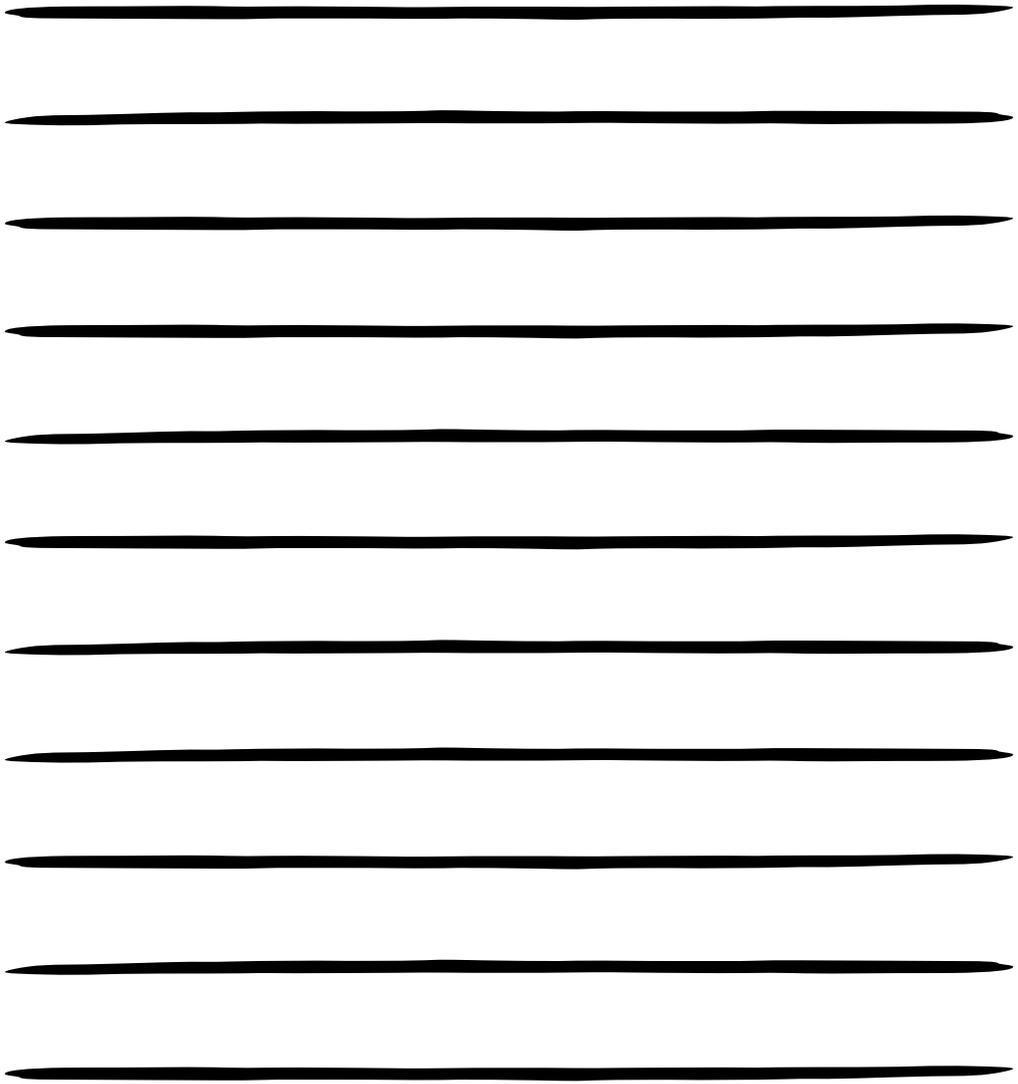
Going

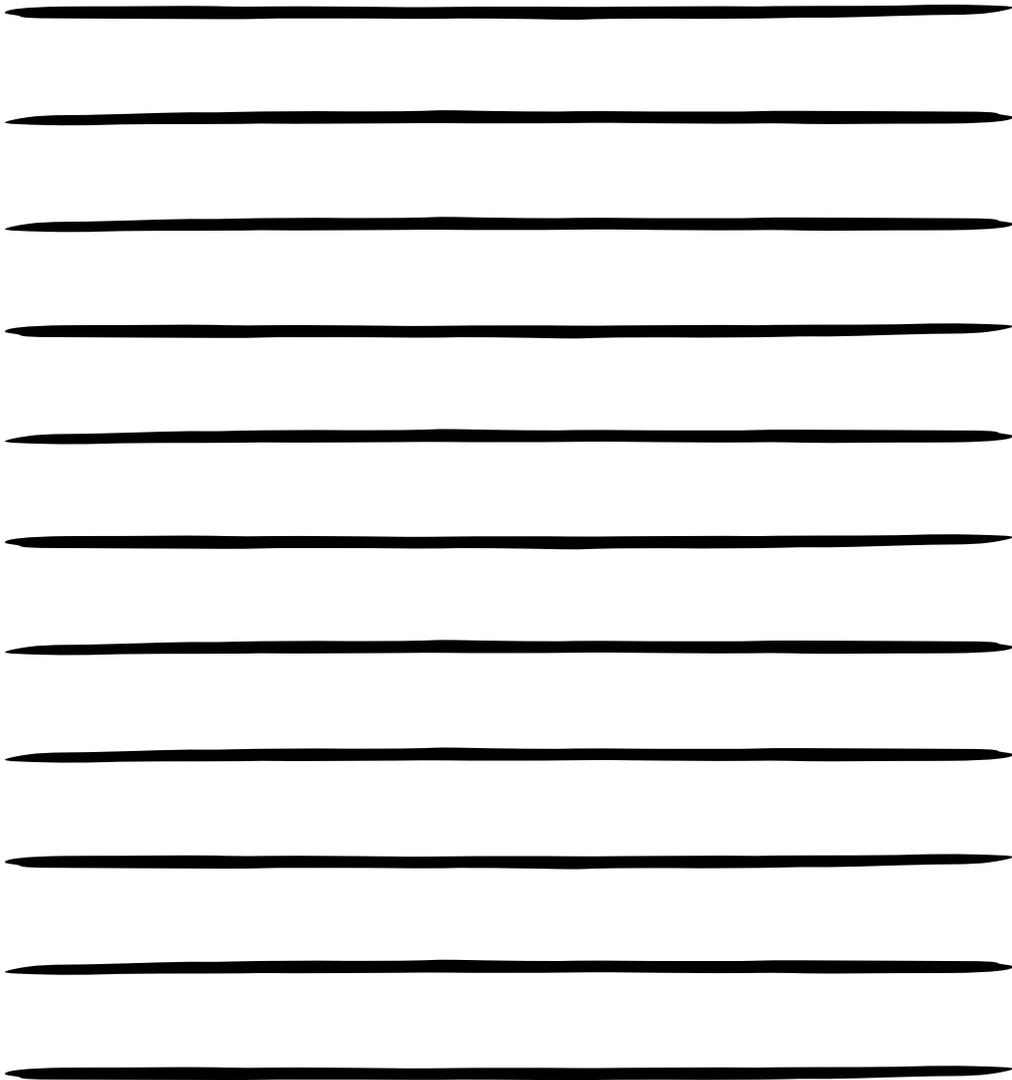
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

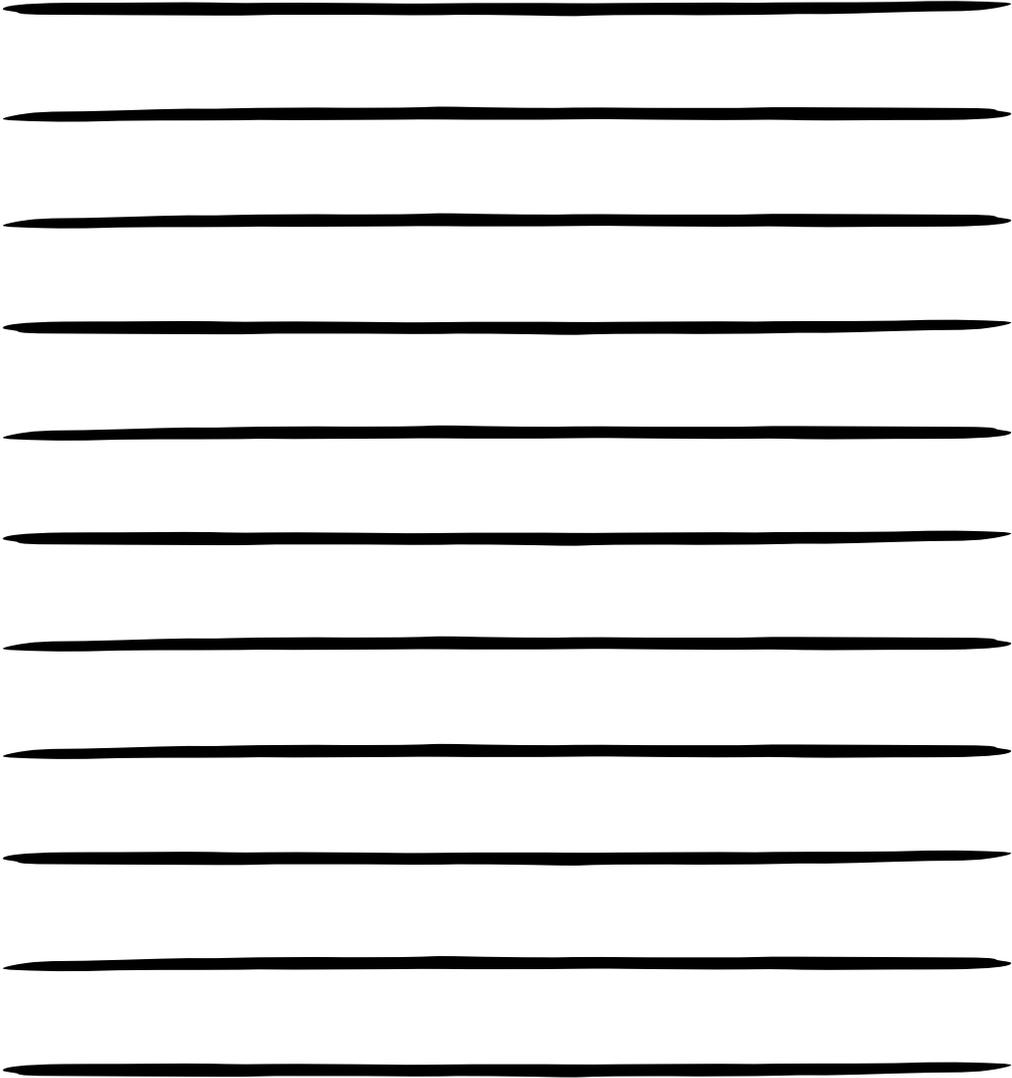
FINAL TAKEAWAYS

What is your biggest strength and your biggest weakness when it comes to following the Red Letters of Jesus?

Ten horizontal lines for writing, spaced evenly down the page.









ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TWITTER: @ZACHZEHNDER

Zach completed his undergraduate work at Concordia University Wisconsin. It was there that he met his wife Allison, and they were married in July 2004. From there, Zach earned his Masters of Divinity from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO in May 2010. Zach and Allison have two boys: Nathan and Brady. In May 2010, Zach accepted a call to plant a church in Mount Dora, FL called theCross. In just a few short years, the church has grown from just his family to several hundreds and is currently the fastest-growing church in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Zach has made worldwide news for his creative ways of doing ministry. In April 2014, Zach made a sarcastic remark in one of his sermons that he would pay for people to get a tattoo of their church's logo as a way to help advertise. While he was just joking about this, it turned out to be a real thing as 21 people got tattooed with the logo and the story went viral!

But that sermon is not the most famous one Zach has preached. In November 2014, Zach broke the Guinness World Record for the Longest Speech Marathon by an individual. Zach preached for 53 hours and 18 minutes and weaved his way from Genesis to Revelation all without having a Bible in front of him (per Guinness rules). The event raised over \$100,000 for a non-profit to buy a house for a men's recovery program. The program now has more than 20 men going through at once.

His hobbies include travel, reading, volleyball, golf, basketball, ping-pong, and entrepreneurial ventures. Zach started a business in his dorm room selling golf headcovers and sold over 150,000 golf headcovers.

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I'm extremely grateful for Allison, my wife! She has been so supportive of our ministry from the time I met her and has also challenged me in my faith in so many different ways. This book would not have happened without her in my life!

I'm excited and thankful to my kids Nathan and Brady for providing so many stories and so much material. Before I had kids, I must have had a boring life! God has big plans for both of you, and I can't wait to see all that you will do!

I'm grateful for my family. My parents, Mark and Sharon, demonstrated firsthand what it looks like to follow Jesus. My siblings, Eric and Charista, have been extremely supportive of me. Your support means the world to me.

I'm grateful for the church I serve, theCross, which has become a family of faith-filled, big-thinking followers of Jesus Christ. Thank you for being serious about reaching out to the community and practicing the Red Letters on a daily basis. I love being your pastor.

I'm grateful for the team of people I work with in Florida. It's a ton of fun seeing people's lives change for Jesus!

I'm grateful for Peter McGowan, Blake Ryan, and the team at Plain Joe Studios. Thank you for believing in this project and helping my dream become a reality.

All glory goes to Jesus Christ, who is crazy enough to give me the opportunity to follow after Him. It is not a burden to follow after Him, but the single greatest opportunity of my lifetime!

APPENDIX

COMMUNITY RALLY IDEAS

Following Jesus was never meant to be done alone. During the Red Letter Challenge, we encourage you to not only do the Challenge together, but also organize community rallies around particular words of Jesus. Rallies are opportunities for groups to come together and make great impact in the community. Here are several examples of how your church could pair certain words of Jesus with a community rally.

Abide in my Word: Host a special Bible study at the church.

Pray earnestly: Host a prayer walk. Gather everyone together and give them ideas and things to pray for.

Worship the Lord Your God: Organize a special worship service to equip and empower people to stay strong in the Challenge.

Let us eat and celebrate: Plan a massive party and invite the community to be part of it.

When you give a dinner, invite the poor, crippled, lame, etc.: Put on a fish fry in the community and invite those who are less fortunate.

Love your neighbor as yourself: Organize a team to go through a neighborhood and clean up people's yards and houses.

Let the little children come to me: Organize an event at a children's hospital or camp to encourage and entertain the children.

I was sick and you took care of me: Organize an event at a local hospital to encourage those who are sick.

Let your light shine before others: Organize a work day with an organization like Habitat for Humanity.

For I was hungry and you gave me food: Organize a food drive for your church or a volunteer work day at a local food pantry.

I was naked and you gave me clothing: Organize a clothing drive at the church and give away the clothes to a local shelter.

Go and proclaim the Kingdom of God: Organize an event to go through the city or neighborhoods and pass out information on who Jesus is and how people can connect to your local church. As you are going, pray for the people you come in contact with.

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⁴⁹ Ibid.



DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO FOLLOW JESUS?

The Red Letter Challenge is a 40-day discipleship challenge. In the Red Letter Challenge, you will be introduced, through the words of Jesus, to the five main principles of being a disciple.

If you are tired of just checking religious boxes, if you know that you were made for something more, and if you want to make a greater difference in this world, the Red Letter Challenge is for you!

BY ZACH ZEHNDER

redletterchallenge.com

