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FOREWORD BY
BOB GOFF

WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE, I took a few months and hitchhiked around New England. I met some really interesting people along the way, and a few creepy ones too. In truth, I suppose I was looking a little creepy myself as a barefoot nineteen-year-old with flaming red hair down to my shoulders, torn jeans, and a stained T-shirt. I didn't need much, just a ride and a pair of shoes.

When people pulled over to give me a ride, I tried to size them up before I got in the car, and they were no doubt trying figure out whether I was safe before they picked me up. I suppose the same thing happens in our faith communities every day. We want to know who we can trust and who we ought to pass by; who we ought to go with and who we should avoid. In short, we're all trying to figure out how to live out our faith and who to do it with. Scott is a good friend of mine and is a person I trust. This book has helped me engage with some of those questions I still have about my faith. I think it will help you with yours.

I had been stuck with my thumb out on a highway outside Bangor, Maine, for a long time. A car pulled over with a kind, bearded man at the wheel. I climbed in the passenger seat and the driver introduced himself to me in a humble voice. "My name is Don," he said, sticking out his hand a little tentatively. Don

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apparently didn't have a last name, and I was okay with that. He was kind of like Jesus or MacGyver or Cher, I figured.

It turned out Don was a hermit and lived alone in the woods. I had heard about hermits, but I don't think I had met one before and I wondered how they lived their lives. Other than the few things I was pretty sure were true, like the fact that they lived alone, I didn't have a lot of reference points. Some of us feel this way about our own faith. We want to follow Jesus. We may have met a few people who said they did. But we just don't know how to do it. Yet while there's no rule book for how to live like a hermit, fortunately, Jesus left behind a lot of information about how we could live like one of his followers. You'll find a great deal of that information in this book.

Some Christians live like hermits in their faith. There are a few things that may have led them into isolation. Perhaps at some point they started caring more about what their faith looked like than what it was. Maybe their opinions about people they disagreed with started blocking their view of these same people as being made by God in his image. Possibly along the way they got burned by people who also said they were following Jesus but acted like they didn't. If this is you, this book isn't just an invitation to come home; it's as if Jesus were pulling over and asking if you want to go there with him.

It was getting late, we were still driving, and Don invited me to stay at his house that night. In a moment of brilliant foolishness, I agreed. The house Don lived in was far from everyone. It had no electricity and no plumbing, just a tank of propane and a small oven. He drew his water from a well behind the house and bartered with his neighbors for everything he needed in his life. Despite

that, it would be a hermit whom God would use to teach me the importance of living in community with him.

I didn't spend just a night with Don; I spent a month with him.

Each morning Don and I made candlesticks and dropped them off at different people's houses. The afternoons were spent in these same people's gardens, picking vegetables for dinner. From an unusually large patch of rhubarb, we picked the stalks, took them home, and made rhubarb pies we would drop off the next morning as we bartered for what we needed. In short, we used what we knew how to do to get whatever else we needed.

I think most of us want our faith to be more real. The problem is, we don't use what we've already got to get what we need. We think we can trade good conduct for God's grace, but we can't; and when we try to, we look like orphans. We all want our faith to look like it's working, too, but we overlook the beauty that can be found only within the authenticity of letting the people around us know when we're lost and hurting. Instead of admitting to the pain and isolation we've experienced in our lives, we distract ourselves with things that won't last and, in the process, forget our absolute need for a savior. The reminder Scott gives us in this book is that God has not left us alone: he's given us each other, he's given us communities of faith to go deeper with, and he's given us his Son. In other words, we don't need to live like hermits anymore.

This book is an invitation for us to return to the most authentic version of our faith. It's also an invitation to join, or create, an authentic community of people trying to go somewhere beautiful with their faith.

It was fall in Maine, and the leaves were just beginning to turn colors. All I thought I needed the day I met Don was a ride and a pair of shoes. What God knew I needed much more was a few reminders about how I could go deeper in my faith. Both Don and

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I needed to risk a little to make those lessons happen. If you want to go deeper in your faith, you'll need to risk a little too.

Eventually, it was time to leave, and Don gave me a ride to the highway so I could start hitchhiking south. We said our goodbyes, and as I got out of the car Don reached into the back seat and handed me a bag. Inside was a pair of his shoes. I've still got them.

If we're willing to show up and risk a little, God will provide us what we need and someone to go with. What Scott has done in these pages is give us some beautiful reminders about what each of us needs and about the someone we can trust to go with. It isn't just a pair of shoes he's given us; it's Jesus.

—Bob Goff, author of *Love Does* and *Everybody, Always*

INTRODUCTION

THESE DAYS, THE WORD *CHRISTIAN* seems to evoke as many negative reactions as it does positive ones.

This bothers me.

Does it bother you?

Critics might summarize their feelings about Christians with these words attributed to Mahatma Gandhi: “I like your Christ, but I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”¹

More recently, San Francisco journalist Herb Caen said, “The trouble with born-again Christians is that they are an even bigger pain the second time around.”²

And painfully—especially coming from an adult Christian convert who then became disenchanted with her church—Vampire Chronicles author Anne Rice wrote, “For those who care, and I understand if you don’t: Today I quit being a Christian. I’m out. I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being ‘Christian’ or to being part of Christianity. It’s simply impossible for me to ‘belong’ to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group. For ten years, I’ve tried. I’ve failed. I’m an outsider. My conscience will allow nothing else.”³

Deservedly infamous. Ouch!

As a forgiven, loved, and Spirit-filled people, we can do better than this.

Can't we?

Christians certainly did at one time. Look no further than Luke's observation about first-century Christians in the book of Acts. Their quality of life was so rich, their worship so genuine, their life together so deep, and their neighbor-love so palpable, that they were "having favor with *all* the people" and "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47, emphasis added). So what went wrong? How did we end up alienating the world around us *from* Christ, rather than attracting it *to* Christ?

As the sentiments noted above make crystal clear, the people of Jesus often have not represented him well, and our poor representation has created a public relations nightmare for the movement that he began through his death, burial, and resurrection. In the eyes of a watching world, our lives are often perceived as being more lackluster than compelling, more contentious than kind, more self-centered than servant-like, more fickle than faithful, more materialistic than generous, more proud than humble.

Rather than shining as a light *to* the culture, we often become products *of* the culture. As those whom Christ has called the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and a city on a hill, we still have a long way to go.

Our generation of Christians is not the first to limp along in its calling to live as salt and light. Since Bible times and throughout history, we have fumbled again and again. Noah's drunkenness, Abraham's misogyny, Jacob's lies, Jesse's parental neglect, Elijah's self-pity, David's adultery and murder, Solomon's womanizing, Peter's abrasiveness and cowardice, and the Corinthian church's worldliness are only a few of the many biblical examples of stumbling saints.

Past and present history also reminds us of horrid things done in the name of Christ that would make the actual Christ want to turn over a table or two—Servetus burned at the stake, the Crusades, the Inquisition, the genocide of Native Americans, institutional slavery, white supremacy, signs reading “Fags Burn in Hell” raised at funerals, blind assertions that the 9/11 terrorist attacks were God’s judgment on America . . . and more.

In his masterful exposition of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that Christians become a light *to* the world to the degree that they stand out as different *from* the world. The world does not thirst for a religious imitation of itself, nor does it thirst for an “us against them” moral turf war with its zealous religious neighbors. The world thirsts for a different kind of neighbor—not the kind who deny their fellow man, take up their comforts, and follow their dreams—but the kind who deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Jesus in his mission of loving a weary world to life. The world also thirsts for a new vision for being human, for pursuing and entering friendship, and for leaving things better than we found them. As Lloyd-Jones wrote, “The glory of the gospel is that when the Church is absolutely *different from the world*, she invariably attracts it.”²⁴

The problem isn’t with Christianity as much as it is with our flawed approach to and understanding of Christianity. We have let ourselves become imbalanced, lopsided, and unfocused (much like the rigid, holier-than-thou Pharisees *and* the materialistic, secular Sadducees of the New Testament). To regain our footing, we need to begin following the whole Jesus and the whole Scripture, into the whole world, the whole time.

As one who longs to see Christianity return to a place of life-giving, contagious presence in the world, I am both haunted and motivated by the characterization in Acts of the early church. That description compels me to ask: What would it look like for

Christians to be reignited in this kind of faith for *our* time? What would it look like for us to become those who live most beautifully, love most deeply, and serve most faithfully in the places where we live, work, and play? What would it look like, as Tim Keller has said, for us to live so compellingly and lovingly in our neighborhoods, cities, and nations that if we were suddenly removed from the world, our nonbelieving neighbors would miss us terribly? What would it look like for Christians to become the *first* place people go for comfort when a life-altering diagnosis comes, when anxiety and depression hit, when a child goes astray, when a spouse files for divorce, or when a breadwinner loses a job? What would it look like for a woman with a crisis pregnancy to see the local church, not the local clinic, as her trustworthy source for love, non-judgment, practical support, wise counsel, and much-needed encouragement? What would it look like for the local church to become the most diverse and welcoming—rather than the most homogeneous and inhospitable—community on earth? What would it look like for Christians to become not only the best kind of friends, but the best kind of enemies, returning insults with kindness and persecution with prayers? What would it look like for Christians, en masse, to start loving and following the whole Jesus and the whole Scripture, the whole time, into the whole world?

In short, what would it look like for Gandhi sympathizers to say, “Your Christians are so *like* your Christ”; for Herb Caen to say that being born again makes people *better*, not worse; and for Anne Rice to want to follow Christ in the church, *alongside* other Christians?

What would it look like for Christians to become an *irresistible force* again, even among their nonbelieving friends, colleagues, and neighbors?

Scripture declares that Christians are sent out to emanate

Christ's aroma to the world (2 Cor. 2:15). They are carriers of his divine imprint, swept up by grace into the honored task of bringing down foretastes of heaven. Jesus declared that we would leave the world, as far as it depended on us, better than we found it. He declared that we would be a sign and shadow of a better world, a world that all have imagined but none have yet fully seen. He declared that over time our movement—rather, *his* movement through us—would become irresistible to people from every nation, tribe, and tongue.

The novelist and poet Madeleine L'Engle wrote that “we draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.”⁵

In spite of this checkered past and present shared by Christ-followers, I write this book as an optimist. I am optimistic because Jesus *still* intends to renew and love the world through his people. I am optimistic because the negative stories, as concerning as they are, don't tell the full story and, therefore, shouldn't be allowed to completely own the narrative. The negative stories aren't the whole story because for every poor representation of Christ, there are a thousand infectiously beautiful ones. For history is also illuminated by L'Engle's “light so lovely” and by a Christian way of life that is truly remarkable and beautiful.

History is peppered with these kinds of lives. For example, Christians have shown groundbreaking leadership in science (Pascal, Copernicus, Newton, Galileo, Lise Meitner, Francis Collins), healthcare (all those hospitals named after a saint), the arts and literature (Rembrandt, Bach, Dorothy Sayers, Dostoevsky, T. S. Eliot, Flannery O'Connor, Makoto Fujimura, Johnny Cash, Bono), the academy (all but one of the Ivy League universities

were founded by Christians), and mercy and justice (William Wilberforce, Hannah More, Dorothy Day, George Mueller, Martin Luther King Jr.).

The identifying mark of the City of God is when citizens of the heavenly city become the very best citizens of the earthly one. To be on the side of Jesus is to be on the side of the world and its flourishing. The gospel of John tells us, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This doesn’t merely describe Christ and his mission; it also defines our purpose as his ambassadors to a lost and fractured world. To put it plainly, we are to love this world.

When Paul tells us to set our minds on things above instead of things on earth (Col. 3:2), we mustn’t assume this means we should check out of the world. On the contrary, when we have our minds set on things above—that is, on things that center around God’s concerns—we become checked in, not checked out, to the world that God so loved. Having been made new in Christ, we have also become his ambassadors in the world, “sent out” to be contagious contributors, not contemptible contrarians, to the world around us. We are meant to be neither holier-than-thou *enemies* of the culture on the one hand, nor lawless and avaricious *products* of the culture on the other. Instead, we are to become culture-*shapers* for the good and flourishing of all. We are meant to resist every urge to lobby and position ourselves to become a powerful and privileged “moral majority”; rather, we are to pursue our God-given and biblically mandated calling to be a fiercely love-driven, self-donating, prophetic minority.

I think it’s time for us to embrace that vision once again, don’t you?

It is heartening to see contemporary observers take note of how Christian belief, in its purest form, produces beautiful lives.

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof frequently writes of how today's Christians outnumber the rest of the world in volunteer hours and dollars given toward the alleviation of poverty and human suffering. The gay mayor of Portland, Oregon, Sam Adams, has spoken publicly about how positive his experience was partnering with local Christian churches to serve the vulnerable communities of Portland. Here in our Nashville community, an abortion provider who is beginning to engage with the claims and ways of Christ recently told a member of our church, "I want your God, whoever he or she is, to be my God"—which appears to be his way of saying, "I like your Christ, not in spite of your Christians, but because of them."

This is the kind of Christianity I want to be part of, and this is the kind of Christianity I am committed to pursue. It is a beautiful and, therefore, a *truer* Christianity that shines a light that is so lovely. It is a Christianity that mirrors the whole Christ and so offers a tired and sometimes cynical world a reason to pause and consider . . . and to start wishing it could be true.

As I hope this book will demonstrate, history has shown that when this kind of transformation occurs among Christians, the "irresistibility" factor soon emerges as a byproduct. Just as a healthy tree can't help but produce fruit, and as a lit candle can't help but produce light, well-formed followers of Christ can't help but become positive contributors to the places they live, work, and play. *Irresistible Faith* is an attempt to nudge us in that direction, away from worldliness and toward a world that thirsts for a hope that only Christ can provide.

Part I of the book is designed to help us draw closer to Christ, our ultimate source of nourishment and light. Part II explores how living in community with other believers is an essential component to this endeavor. And the final section encourages us to take the grace we have received from Christ and from each other into the

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world in a way that uplifts the poor, integrates faith and work, and leaves the world better than we found it.

Are you ready to embark on a journey with the irresistible Christ, alongside an irresistible community, to the end that we all, by the grace and power of Christ, become the kind of Christians the world can't resist?

If so, then Jesus says, "Come, follow me" (Matt. 19:21).