

SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 11 FEBRUARY 2018



Jesus Is Not Your Cheerleader

Melissa Kruger

There's a common trend among many women's events, popular books, and blogs today. Whether it's devotionals that speak words directly from Jesus, or women's conferences that focus us on fulfilling a grand purpose, it seems we've whittled down the words of Jesus to only those of encouragement, support, and affirmation.

We're comfortable hearing him (and one another) say: *You're wonderful! You've got this, girl! Be yourself! You can do it!*

And, to be clear, Jesus does encourage.

He offers words of strength to the weary and comfort to the hurting. In a world where we so often feel we don't measure up, we need his encouragement daily.

By focusing on only part of his message, however, I'm concerned that we've reduced Jesus to a spiritual cheerleader. And, in turn, that's what we've become to one another. We offer words of affirmation, but not rebuke; words of forgiveness, but not repentance. We rightly celebrate his grace, but often forget to mourn our sin.

In doing so, we miss out on life-giving realities in our relationship with Jesus and one another. It's the friends willing to call me out in my sin and say hard things whom I trust the most. They're the ones I return to time and again for advice and wisdom – precisely because they recognize that who I am isn't all I need to be.

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Jesus speaks to us in a variety of ways – he teaches, commands, rebukes, calls, and exhorts. When we reduce Jesus to our personal “rah-rah” section in the grandstand, we miss out on the faithful friend we so desperately need.

If you're mainly hearing “you're great!” from your devotional or women's ministry, I invite you back to God's Word, where we hear the voice of Jesus in a diversity of ways.

Jesus Teaches: ‘I Am’

In the Gospels, it's clear Jesus thinks one person is supremely important for us to know about: himself.

He teaches in every way, at every turn, about who he is: I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the door. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the true vine. I am that I am.

For some, this list might evoke images of a self-centred guy who manages to bring every conversation back to himself. But with Jesus, he teaches us about himself because he knows our understanding of his identity is the thing we most need.

If your devotional, Bible study group, or conference is more focused on who you are than who Jesus is, it's time to pick up a new book or find another group. We desperately need to know more about Jesus, for in him we find everything we need.

Jesus Commands: ‘Obey My Word’

Jesus wants us to obey God in everything we do and say. While the Pharisees tried to lower the standard of obedience so they could meet it, Jesus calls us to true obedience – not just in word and deed, but in our desires and affections too.

He wants our whole lives, so he bids us to keep his commands: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

Jesus wants us to obey, but not out of duty or drudgery (though at times obedience may feel like both). Jesus wants us to obey because he knows God's Word reveals God's best. Walking in his commands may not always feel joyful, but it leads to a joy-filled life.

Jesus Rebukes: 'Flee from Sin'

Jesus doesn't look at our sin and say, "No big deal, just do whatever makes you happy." Instead he says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:29).

Jesus makes it crystal clear how he feels about our sin: He hates it. He knows it's corrosive to our souls. He knows it never fulfils, and always destroys. Because he loves us, he wants us to flee from sin and call others do the same (Matthew 18:15-17).

When teachers or books promote self-centred behaviour as a means of self-fulfilment, Jesus sternly rebukes and warns against them (Luke 17:1-3).

Jesus Calls: 'Take Up Your Cross'

A servant isn't greater than his master. Jesus walked the road of the cross, and he expects that we'll do likewise: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

If there's no cross in our Christianity, no denial in our own lives, we have to wonder if we're following the real Jesus. As Elisabeth Elliot wrote, "To be a follower of the Crucified means, sooner or later, a personal encounter with the cross. And the cross always entails loss."

When our devotionals or teachers speak more about finding our lives than losing them, we miss out on the wonder of the Christian life. If we're frightened to call others to the narrow path – the life of a living sacrifice – it might be because we're still hanging our hopes on this present world.

Yet when we fix our hope on heaven, we're liberated to pour out our lives on earth. And, to our surprise, we find our lives precisely by giving them away.

Jesus Exhorts: 'Go into All the World'

Jesus does have a wonderful purpose and mission for your life. It involves you, but it's not about you. It's about him – his kingdom, his will, his glory.

And sisters, there's no better purpose in all the world.

It's about him – his kingdom, his will, his glory.

Jesus wants you to take the message of the gospel wherever he's placed you. He wants you to scatter seed and enjoy a share of the harvest (Matthew 28:19-20).

To do so, however, we need all of his words – including his hardest teachings – to strengthen our witness. Toning down the truth of Jesus to make him more palatable actually does just the opposite – he loses all richness of flavour and becomes a bland imitation.

Jesus Saves: 'Hear the Good News'

It's precisely because we're *not* okay and we *can't* do this that we so desperately need a Saviour.

Jesus doesn't just promise us heaven; he promises transformation today. He takes what is dead and makes it alive. He gives us a new heart. He calls us. He redeems us. He adopts us. He works resurrection power within us. We're no longer slaves to self; we're freed to live for him. The news we get to share is so much better than "You're okay, I'm okay."

Sisters, I encourage you: Plant yourself in Jesus, not your feelings. Abide in his Word, not someone else's. Don't settle for less. He is more than our personal cheerleader. He is our beginning and end.



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Edited from: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sisters-jesus-is-not-your-cheerleader/>

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