

RADICAL

SMALL-GROUP STUDY

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PLATT

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THE AUTHOR

Dr. David Platt, the pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, is deeply devoted to Christ and His Word. David's first love in ministry is disciple making—the simple, biblical model of teaching God's Word, mentoring others, and sharing faith. He's traveled extensively to teach the Bible alongside church leaders throughout the United States and around the world.

David has authored several books, including *Radical*, *Radical Together*, and *Follow Me*. He's the founder of Radical (Radical.net), a resource ministry dedicated to serving the church in making disciples of all nations.

David and his wife, Heather, have four children: Caleb, Joshua, Mara Ruth, and Isaiah.

INTRODUCTION

High atop the Andes Mountains, the rays of the sun strike ice, and a single drop of water forms. It begins to trace a hesitant course downward, gradually joining other drops of water to become a steady stream. The stream gains speed and strength. Thousands of feet below and hundreds of miles later, what were once single drops have converged to become the mightiest river on earth: the Amazon. Flowing into the Atlantic Ocean at a rate of more than seven million cubic feet per second, the Amazon is more powerful than the next 10 largest rivers in the world combined.

In my first book, *Radical*, I explored how the biblical gospel affects individual Christian lives in the same way these single drops of water melt and flow down the mountain. The truth of Christ penetrates our hearts, melts our assumptions, and propels us on a journey of abandonment to God. In a world of urgent spiritual and physical need, gospel-believing, God-exalting believers don't have time to waste their lives on a faith that's been distorted by the American Dream. The American Dream prizes what people can accomplish when they believe in themselves, trust in their abilities, and work hard. But the gospel has different priorities. It beckons us to die to ourselves, believe in God, and trust in His power. The goal of the American Dream is to make much of ourselves. The goal of the gospel is to make much of God. In *Radical* I challenged believers to abandon everything for the sake of the gospel, take up their crosses, and follow Christ.

But you and I aren't intended to plunge down the mountain of radical obedience alone. The force of a single drop of water descending the Andes is minuscule. Similarly, as long as individual Christians journey alone, their effect will be minimal. But as men and women who are surrendered to the person of Christ join together in churches that are committed to the purpose of Christ, nothing can stop the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

So in *Radical Together* I considered what can happen when we apply the revolutionary claims of Christ to our communities of faith. I contemplated the force of a people who come together to enjoy God's grace in the church while they extend God's glory in the world. I challenged believers to answer this question: How can we in the church best unleash the people of God in the Spirit of God with the Word of God for the glory of God in the world?

This small-group Bible study combines the truths of *Radical* and *Radical Together* to frame Jesus' call to genuine discipleship. Through these six weeks of study, you will learn what Jesus meant when He called people to follow Him. When you answer the call to radical abandonment, you recognize your desperate need for Christ and your utter dependency on His Word. You adopt Jesus' priorities of caring for the poor and sharing the gospel with the lost. And you learn to lock arms with other believers in single-minded, death-defying obedience to one objective: the declaration of Jesus' gospel for the demonstration of His glory to all nations.

WEEK 1

RADICAL ABANDONMENT

START

Welcome to your first small-group discussion of *Radical*. Begin the session with the activities below.

In recent years several buzzwords and jargon catchphrases have worked their way into mainstream Christianity. Sometimes these words and phrases are helpful for clarifying our beliefs or distinguishing a new way of thinking. Other times they aren't so helpful.

Place a check mark beside any of the following buzzwords and catchphrases you've heard in recent weeks. As time allows, discuss which of these words and phrases are helpful and which are harmful in today's culture.

- Seeker-sensitive
- The sinner's prayer
- Inviting Jesus into your heart
- Devotion (as in "I had a great devotion this morning.")
- Being in the center of God's will
- Quiet time
- Fellowship
- Something being part of God's plan
- Testimony

What are some other buzzwords or jargon phrases that you feel strongly about, either positively or negatively?

How does a person become a disciple of Jesus Christ? Try to answer this question without using any buzzwords or jargon phrases.

To prepare to view the DVD segment, read aloud Matthew 10:37-38:

"The person who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; the person who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me."

WATCH

Complete the viewer guide below as you watch DVD session 1.

We need to ask the question, Have we ever really come to Jesus on _____ ?

Requirements for a Christian's Sacrifice

Jesus requires superior _____.

There is a dangerous temptation for us to try to _____ Jesus' words to justify the way we live.

All your affections belong to _____.

In comparison to Christ, we _____ the people we love.

This changes our _____.

It starts with a reservoir of love for the _____ of Christ and God.

Christianity does not consist of _____ obedience to Christ.

Biblical Christianity sees the supremacy of Christ and is so drawn toward Him that our _____ for Him drives everything we do.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means you forsake all relationships in favor of an intimate _____ with Him.

Requirements for a Christian's Sacrifice

Jesus requires exclusive _____.

Through the cross of Christ, we _____ to the life we live.

This changes our _____.

We are _____ constructing a building.

Count the _____ of following Jesus.

We are _____ fighting a battle.

Video sessions available for purchase at lifeway.com/radical

RESPOND

Following David's DVD teaching segment is the story of someone who is applying the principles of *Radical* through a sacrificial commitment to Jesus.

Discuss the DVD teaching segment with your group, using the questions below.

What struck you as new or interesting from the DVD segment? What questions do you have?

Take a moment to discuss David's central question from the video segment: "Have we ever really come to Jesus on His terms?"

Where have you seen an example of superior love? How did that love impact the people who experienced it and observed it?

What is the cost of following Jesus? How do we go about counting that cost?

Take a couple of minutes to think about a luxury in your life that may be preventing you from fully entering the battle as a warrior for God. What step could you take in the next week to remove that obstacle? Consider sharing that step with the group for increased accountability.

Do you think it's possible to live in the radical way David is suggesting? Why or why not?

Suggested Scripture memory for this week:

***"He said to him, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands' "* (Matt. 22:37-40).**

Read week 1 and complete the activities before the next group experience. Consider going deeper into this content by reading chapters 1 and 3 in David Platt's book *Radical* and chapter 1 in *Radical Together*.

RADICAL
ABANDONMENT

No one could ever accuse Jesus of being a great public-relations guy. Who else but Jesus would make it His practice to disperse crowds with difficult and controversial teachings when it would have been so easy to rally an army?

Who else but Jesus would choose to continually insult the power structure of His time rather than try to make influential friends in high places?

Who else but Jesus would align Himself with the lowest and the least of His society, those with no political clout or social standing?

But that's what Jesus did. That's what He's still doing. Perhaps with all of our educational advancements, the multiplicity of Bible studies and books available to us, and the abundance of churches in many parts of the world, we've forgotten that following Jesus isn't like choosing which flavor of syrup you want in your coffee.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to forsake everyone and everything other than Him. It's a call to a radical abandonment.

DAY 1

FOLLOW ME

Picture the scene with me. It's a clear day out on the lake. Two brothers are fishing, and the catch is good. They already know this is going to be a good day, and they're excited about totaling up the final catch at day's end.

They hear someone talking to them from the shore a short way off. They shield their eyes from the sun and cock their heads to listen. They're able to distinctly make out the two words that would change the rest of their lives:

"Follow Me."

Read Matthew 4:18-22. Why do you think Jesus called Peter and Andrew to follow Him rather than to believe in Him?

How are following Jesus and believing in Jesus linked together?

What did abandonment require for the early disciples identified in this passage?

“Follow Me.” These two words contained radical implications for the lives of the disciples. In a time when the sons of fishers were also fishers, these men would have grown up around the sea. Fishing was the source of their livelihood and all they’d ever known. It represented everything familiar and natural to them.

That’s what Jesus was calling them away from.

Look back at the passage again. What, specifically, did these men have to leave in order to follow Jesus? List those things in the left column. Then list in the right column what was represented by each thing they left.

LEFT BEHIND

WHAT IT REPRESENTED

By calling these men to leave their boats, Jesus was calling them to abandon their careers. When He called them to leave their nets, He was calling them to abandon their possessions. When He called them to leave their father in the boat by himself, He was calling them to abandon their family and friends. Ultimately, Jesus was calling them to abandon themselves.

The men were leaving certainty for uncertainty, safety for danger, and self-preservation for self-denunciation. Let’s put ourselves in the positions of these eager followers of Jesus in the first century. What if you were the one stepping out of the boat? What if you were the potential disciple being told to drop your nets? What if it were your father asking where you were going?

Put yourself in the boat that day. How do you honestly think you would have responded?

What would have been the most difficult part of following Jesus in that moment? Why?

Do you think most Christians have had to leave much to follow Jesus? Why or why not?

This is where we need to pause to consider whether we're starting to redefine Christianity. We have to give up everything we have to follow Jesus. But slowly, subtly, we have reduced following Jesus to the *idea* of following Jesus.

We do this in all sorts of ways. We rationalize Jesus' demanding teachings: "Of course, Jesus wasn't *actually* telling you to abandon your family. And of course, He wasn't *really* saying to leave everything behind to follow Him." While it's true that Jesus didn't—and doesn't—require everyone to leave their father and their occupation to follow Him, He does require absolute obedience and commitment. Rather than joyfully embracing His call, we have the self-serving tendency to water it down to be theoretical sacrifice and hypothetical abandonment. We want to follow a Jesus that doesn't require anything of us.

Have you ever rationalized like this when reading Jesus' words? Do you remember a specific occasion?

Why do you think we do this?

In essence, we've redefined Christianity. We've given in to the dangerous temptation to take the Jesus of the Bible and twist Him into a version of Jesus we're more comfortable with. It's a Jesus who's OK with our materialism, fine with nominal devotion that doesn't require any sacrifice, and pleased with a brand of faith that requires attendance on Sunday but no real commitment in day-to-day life.

But I wonder if I could help you push through the haze of self-justification and ask a simple question as we study the words of Christ together:

WHAT IF HE WAS ACTUALLY SERIOUS?

DAY 2

A CALL TO DIE

What if Jesus was serious?

It's a haunting thought, isn't it? The implications are staggering. They shake the core of what we think we believe as Christians. The truth is that people in many parts of the world take Jesus' words seriously. People abandon their families and careers. They have to when they're threatened with persecution and mistreatment. They're living the truth of Luke 9.

Read Luke 9:57-62. Record what Jesus claimed was the cost of following Him.

How do we misunderstand these words of Jesus when we don't take them literally?

Three men approached Jesus, eager to follow Him. It would have been an evangelist's dream. All that was left for Jesus to do was to walk through the Roman Road or lead them in a sinner's prayer. Right?

But in surprising fashion Jesus seems to have tried to talk them out of following Him. To the first man Jesus said to expect homelessness on the journey ahead because followers of Christ aren't guaranteed that even their basic need for shelter will be met. To the second man Jesus said there's a higher priority than even the closest familial relations. To the third Jesus said being in a relationship with Him requires total, superior, and exclusive devotion.

Become homeless. Let someone else bury your dad. Don't even say good-bye to your family.

What do you imagine the response would be if such a sermon were given in a North American church today?

Read Luke 14:25-35. In one sentence what was Jesus' core message in this teaching?

Jesus never sugarcoated His message. He didn't play it down in order to gain popularity. He never glossed over it in order to increase His influence. He always told people the truth. But even after two thousand years we're still trying to find loopholes in the cost of following Christ.

That's the whole point of Luke 14:25-35: to consider what we're getting into before we do. Following Jesus isn't meant to be an add-on to real life, whereby we can do other things and follow Jesus too. The call to follow Christ is the only thing. It's all or nothing.

Read Luke 9:23. Why do you think Jesus chose the image of the cross to describe following Him?

This verse takes counting the cost to another level. In fact, for Jesus' original audience the teaching would have been even more scandalous. We lose some of the impact when we read it today, but for the original hearers the cross wasn't a bumper sticker or a piece of jewelry. It was a mark of shame and death. Crucifixion remains the most brutal form of execution ever devised.

Jesus was calling His followers to pick up an instrument of torture to follow Him. If someone was carrying a cross through town, nobody wondered where he or she was going. There was no hope left for them. No dreams. No aspirations. No hope of escape. Their fate was sealed.

That's what Jesus compared the Christian life to. It's first and foremost a call to die.

What parts of life are you still clinging to?

If you took seriously the call to die, what are some practical ways your life would have to change?

Carrying the cross has a finality to it. It's about giving up any claim on your life. That's what it really means to call Jesus Lord. It means He is your Master and your King. He has ultimate ownership over you, and that ownership transcends your desires, perceived needs, and dreams.

SO WHAT DO YOU THINK?

HAVE YOU REALLY COUNTED THE COST?

WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

We've been conditioned to expect not only having our cake but eating it too. Nowhere is this more visible than in our commitment to our possessions. Despite the warnings over and over in Scripture about the danger of wealth and money, as well as exhortations to give freely and sacrificially, we continue to find any way we can to justify our excess.

Materialism, maybe more than anything else, stands in opposition to the call to follow Jesus. It certainly did for the potential follower in Mark 10 who has come to be known as the rich young ruler.

Read Mark 10:17-31. Does this man seem as though He genuinely wanted to follow Jesus? Why or why not?

Does Jesus' response surprise you at any point? Why or why not?

If a man like the rich young ruler had come to you asking a similar question, how would you have responded? Why?

This guy was young, rich, intelligent, and influential. He was a prime prospect for the Kingdom, eager and ready to go. If we were in Jesus' place, we might have been salivating at the opportunity. Think about what a guy like this, with all his influence and prestige, could do. It's a no-brainer; we have to get him in.

Unfortunately, Jesus didn't have the personal-evangelism books we have today that tell us how to draw the net and close the sale. Rather than leading him through a simple prayer, Jesus gave him something else to do: "You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me" (Mark 10:21).

Why do you think Jesus responded this way?

What does the young man's ultimate reaction reveal about the way he felt about his possessions?

Jesus is nothing if not consistent. It's the same call He issued throughout all of the Gospels to His would-be disciples: "Come, but when you come, leave everything else behind."

But let's not neglect the second half of Jesus' invitation: "Come, follow Me" (v. 21). Jesus wasn't just calling the man away from His treasure; He was calling Him toward greater treasure. This is very important because if we aren't careful, we can misinterpret these radical calls to abandonment and think Jesus doesn't want the best for us.

On the contrary, Jesus loves us so much that He's unwilling for us to settle for less than the best.

Reread the previous sentence. Where do you see that principle at work in the story of the rich young ruler?

At what point did Jesus love the man in verse 21?

Why is that significant?

Jesus looked at the man and loved Him. It was from this love that Jesus gave the call to radical abandonment. Jesus wasn't trying to strip this man of all his pleasure. Instead, He was offering him the satisfaction of eternal treasure. Jesus was saying, "It'll be better not just for the poor but for you as well when you abandon the stuff you're holding on to."

Read Matthew 13:44. How is the truth of this parable similar to the story of the rich young ruler?

Notice in this parable that the finder of the treasure didn't begrudgingly sell his property. Instead, He recognized the true value of what he had found and in joy sold everything he had. Why? Because he had found something worth losing everything for.

This is the picture of Jesus in the Gospels. He is someone worth losing everything for. If we walk away from the Jesus of the Bible, we might be richer on earth, but we sacrifice eternal life and riches. However, when we abandon the trinkets of this world and respond to Jesus' radical invitation, we discover the infinite treasure of knowing and experiencing Him.

**THE QUESTION IS WHETHER
WE REALLY BELIEVE HIM TO BE WORTH IT.**

THE TYRANNY OF THE GOOD

Throughout history individuals have embraced the value of following Jesus. Having done so, they didn't look with longing on the things of this world. Instead, they looked back at what they thought was valuable, only to be dismayed at their shocking lack of vision. There was no comparison between what they lost and what they gained. This is true not only for individuals but also for the body of Christ. What if the people of God, as a whole, began to see the immense value of Jesus? What if a massive force of Christians started following Jesus with reckless abandon? That's a world-changing proposition.

What are some obstacles that might stand in the way of an entire church's desire to live for Jesus with reckless abandon?

Describe a season during the life of your church when you felt it was close to this kind of abandonment.

What were the catalysts?

Did something happen to stop the momentum?

One of the worst enemies of Christians can be good things in the church. Of course, some will disagree with my claim; surely sin and Satan are our worst enemies. True enough, but we *know* sin and Satan are our enemies. We *know* we need to be on our guard against them. But too often we're oblivious to the threat posed by the good things we're doing. We've laid down our defenses against the way the *good* can hinder the *best*. In this sense good things can subtly become some of our worst enemies.

Reread the previous paragraph. What good things in the church might become the enemy of the best?

What is an individual Christian's responsibility in moving the church toward the best?

Read Acts 6:1-7. What principles about churches' priorities can you glean from this account?

Discussions about allocations of resources and church programming aren't a new phenomenon. Even in the earliest days of the church, believers had to meet together and decide what was going to be really important to them.

In Acts 6 the issue was the distribution of food to the widows in the community. The church responded not only to the importance of the need but also to the importance of prayer and Scripture. They looked objectively at everything they were involved in and reorganized to make sure the best wasn't suffering for the sake of the good.

But here's a key difference between that day and ours: we're not deciding the best method to distribute food to the needy so that we can have ample time to pray and study God's Word. Rather, we're deciding whether to allocate resources to bigger buildings. We're evaluating the effectiveness of the 17th program on the church calendar this week. That's the true danger: that we waste our lives on religious activity that's devoid of spiritual productivity, being active in the church but not advancing the kingdom of God.

Think about the time you've been a member of a local church. Have you been more committed to activity in the church or to advancing the kingdom of God?

How do you know?

Activity can't replace substance. As Christians today, you and I can easily deceive ourselves into thinking dedication to church programs automatically equals devotion to Kingdom purposes. We can easily fill our lives and our churches with *good* things requiring our resources and *good* activities demanding our attention. But these things may not ultimately be the *best* for the enjoyment of the gospel in our churches and the advance of the gospel in our communities.

To pursue the best, some of the good has to go. For that to happen and for the church to follow the example of Acts 6, we have to be willing, not only in our lives but also in our churches, to put everything on the table and evaluate it in light of a radical abandonment to God.

**WE MUST BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE GOOD THINGS IN THE
CHURCH IN ORDER TO EXPERIENCE THE GREAT THINGS OF GOD.**

DAY 5

PUTTING EVERYTHING ON THE TABLE

To experience the great things of God in the church, we have to put everything on the table. The budget, the programs, the classes, the vision—everything must be up for reconsideration before God. We must release all to Him and ask him to show us His priorities and purposes.

I'm not talking about biblical essentials and theological nonnegotiables. We don't need to change the words of God or the truths of the gospel. The church in Acts 6 certainly didn't.

Rather, this church sought to align itself with those very truths. The result was amazing: "The preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

What specific things in your church do you have the ability to put on the table for reevaluation?

How might you go about doing so without creating a spirit of disunity in the church?

The Word of God will tell us the right priorities for a church. In Matthew 16, the first time we know that Jesus used the word *church*, He made clear the mission of the people of God.

Read Matthew 16:13-20. How did Peter respond to Jesus' question?

**Do you think Peter understood the implications of what He was saying?
Why or why not?**

How does Peter's confession of Jesus relate to the church?

This was a landmark moment in Jesus' ministry. Amid all the confusion over Jesus' identity, Peter boldly confessed Jesus to be the Messiah. Given Peter's words and actions in the coming chapters of the Gospels, he didn't fully understand what he was saying, for Jesus was an entirely different kind of Savior than anyone expected. He wasn't the sword-wielding warrior they were looking for; He was the Suffering Servant they never imagined.

Nevertheless, Peter's confession would be the bedrock for anyone—past, present, or future—who would be called a Christian. The church, and everything it is and does, is built on this truth. The church consists of those who have been called out by God to accomplish His mission.

This mission will be opposed by the forces of darkness, yet they will never overcome it. Despite that opposition, woven into the fabric of God's people is a commitment not to back down but to press forward in obedience to Christ. The church isn't meant simply to defend itself from attack; it's meant to push forward.

Read Matthew 16:13-20 again. How do you see the church defending itself today?

How do you see the church pushing forward?

If we want to push forward to shed light in the darkness, we must be unshackled from what holds us back. Put simply, we need to let go of some things. And we need to begin by asking ourselves some questions.

Are you and I personally willing to put everything in our lives on the table for Christ to determine what needs to stay and what needs to go?

Are your church and my church willing to put on the table every program we've created, every position we've established, every innovation we've adopted, every building we've constructed, every idea we've formulated, every team we've assembled, and every activity we've organized? Are we willing to ask God if there's a better way to use the time, energy, and money He has given us for His glory in the world?

Are you and I willing to say, "Lord, we don't want to settle for good things as Your people. We want only Your best"?

WHEN WE TAKE THIS STEP OF SURRENDER
AND OBEDIENCE TOGETHER, WE'LL FIND OURSELVES
BECOMING PART OF A MOVEMENT OF GOD'S PEOPLE
WHO ARE ACCOMPLISHING GOD'S PURPOSE.

WEEK 2

RADICAL GRACE

Welcome back to this small-group discussion of *Radical*.

What struck you as new or interesting from week 1 of the workbook? What questions do you have?

What specifically have you abandoned in order to follow Jesus? What specifically have you gained?

How would you define *materialism* as a way of life? In what areas does materialism clash with Christianity in day-to-day living?

At the end of the previous group experience, you identified one step you could take to remove an obstacle preventing you from fully serving as a warrior for God. If you're comfortable doing so, share whether you were able to take that action and anything you experienced as a result.

To prepare to view the DVD segment, read aloud Matthew 6:19-21:

“Don’t collect for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

WATCH

Complete the viewer guide below as you watch DVD session 2.

A Radical Approach

Jesus' call to salvation demands total _____.

Salvation is never a matter of _____ reformation.

Salvation is a matter of _____ transformation.

If our lives do not reflect the character of Christ, there is a _____ issue at work.

Jesus is not merely a respectable _____.

Jesus is the sovereign _____.

A Radical Affection

Jesus calls us to give sacrificially because He _____ us.

Jesus loves rich people enough to tell them the _____.

God is a Shepherd who _____ us.

God is a Father who _____ in us.

God is a King who _____ for us.

A Radical Command

Jesus gives _____, not considerations.

Five Different Commands

1. _____. 2. _____. 3. _____. 4. _____. 5. _____.

As followers of Christ, we do not consider _____. We _____.

Video sessions available for purchase at lifeway.com/radical

RESPOND

Following David's DVD teaching segment is the story of a couple whose hearts have been transformed by Jesus' love and grace.

Discuss the DVD teaching segment with your group, using the questions below.

What struck you as most challenging from the DVD segment? Why?

How have you been taught to practice evangelism in today's culture? What are the strengths and weaknesses of those methods?

In your own words what does it mean to have Christ in your heart? What are the symptoms of that condition?

What does it look like to live the American Dream? What are the symptoms of that condition?

Look again at Mark 10:21. Which of Jesus' five commands is most difficult for you to obey? Why?

What is a radical step you could take to obey one of Jesus' five commands this week? If you're willing, talk about that step with the group in order to get the wisdom and counsel of others.

Suggested Scripture memory for this week:

"If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but closes his eyes to his need—how can God's love reside in him?" (1 John 3:17).

Read week 2 and complete the activities before the next group experience. Consider going deeper into this content by reading chapters 1, 2, and 6 in David Platt's book *Radical* and chapter 2 in *Radical Together*.