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JOHN C. MAXWELL
& CHRIS HODGES

JESUS
the HIGH
ROAD
LEADER

FOLLOW THE PATH HE
WANTS US TO TRAVEL

JESUS THE HIGH ROAD LEADER

Follow the Path He Wants Us To Travel

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WHAT ROAD WILL YOU TAKE?

Jesus has a message for every one of his followers, a message that is clear and life changing. He expressed it in Matthew 5:13-16:

[Jesus said,] “Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.”

Here’s another way to put it: “You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.” (MSG)

Jesus wants us to be salt and light. Salt makes things better, and light makes things brighter. We are called to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Jesus modeled this every day of his life on earth by being an example of a leader living on the high road. What do I mean by the high road? There are only three paths we can walk in life:

- **The Low Road:** People on this road selfishly take more than they give, and as a result, instead of making the world better and brighter, they make the world worse and darker.
- **The Middle Road:** People on this road focus on fairness and often keep score. They may not be aware of it, but they maintain the status quo, and nothing gets better or brighter.
- **The High Road:** People on this road follow Jesus' example. They give more than they take. They serve others out of love. They turn the other cheek instead of taking offense. Their lives reflect the behavior of Jesus. And because they do these things, they make the world better and brighter.

Many Christians believe they can take the middle road and be like Jesus, but that isn't true. Follow the life of Jesus in the

Gospels, and it becomes clear that He has shown us the path we are to walk: the high road. In fact, Jesus expressed his opinion about Christians who follow the middle road. He spoke about them to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:16-17:

JESUS WANTS US
TO BE SALT AND
LIGHT. SALT MAKES
THINGS BETTER,
AND LIGHT MAKES
THINGS BRIGHTER.

I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold, you're not hot—far better to be either cold or hot! You're stale. You're stagnant. You make me want to vomit. You brag, "I'm rich, I've got it made, I need nothing from anyone," oblivious that in fact you're a pitiful, blind beggar, threadbare and homeless. (MSG)

Jesus wants everyone to follow him wholeheartedly on the high road.

HIGH OR LOW?

Several years ago, it was popular for Christians to wear bracelets that said, "WWJD?"—What Would Jesus Do? Those letters were meant to be a daily reminder to think about what Jesus

would do in any situation they faced. While that may have been a good question, Chris and I want to encourage you to DWJD!—Do What Jesus Did! Take the same high road Jesus did. Look at Jesus' example and follow it.

Jesus valued all people—do I value all people?

Jesus gave more than he received—do I give more than I receive?

Jesus didn't keep score—do I stop myself from keeping score?

Jesus acknowledged his humanness—do I acknowledge my humanness?

Jesus did the right things for the right reasons—do I do the right things for the right reasons?

Jesus lived an authentic life—do I live an authentic life?

Jesus placed others first—do I place others first?

Jesus brought people together—do I bring people together?

Jesus embraced God's values and lived them out perfectly. Contrast the life and leadership of Jesus with the people who are leading today. Our world is experiencing a values deficit. Too many leaders devalue people who are not like them and fail to live out high-road values. Sadly, this happens even in the Church. Why? I believe we have become distracted. Too many of us have put our hope in government and human laws to bring about a better life for us. Even worse, we put our hope in elected

leaders of both parties who don't embrace the values of Jesus. Many of these people are low-road leaders who lack civility, lack authenticity, divide the people, place themselves and their party above everyone else, keep score, and get even with others when they lose. They have no idea how to be a servant leader.

Jesus modeled the way by washing people's feet and going to the cross. And he challenged his followers to make sacrifices to serve others, rather than expecting others to make sacrifices to serve them. He said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

Following the example of politics, we have allowed our *differences* with others to become *divisions* between ourselves and others. While differences are inevitable, creating divisions is a choice. It isn't necessary for us to build walls with others to follow Jesus' example. For example, my wife, Margaret, and I have been married for fifty-five years. There are areas where we do not agree, yet we still love, value, and respect each other.

DWJD!—DO
WHAT JESUS
DID!

People will tell you to create divisions, pull away, or challenge the opposition. During an election season, they will say the most important decision you will make is who you vote for. That's not

true. The most important decision is who you are going to *be*! Jesus said, “In the same way I loved you, you love one another.

THE MOST
IMPORTANT
DECISION IS
WHO YOU ARE
GOING TO *BE*!

This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other” (John 13:34-35, MSG). The modeling of Jesus the high-road leader and everything in Scripture calls all Christ followers to walk a higher road than others do.

HOW WILL YOU WALK?

Recently my pastor, Todd Mullins, challenged everyone in the congregation of Christ Fellowship to adopt a biblical perspective of who we are as Christians and how to live our lives. As he did this, he reminded us of three truths about ourselves as followers of Christ:

1. We Are Not Only Citizens of a Country—We Are Citizens of Heaven

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul challenged them not to be “enemies of the cross of Christ.” He pointed out, “Their mind is set on earthly things,” and reminded them as followers of Christ,

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (3:18-21). In other words, the world we inhabit is not our world. We are only passing through it, and we must never forget that.

2. We Are Not Just Citizens of Heaven—We are Ambassadors of Christ

To the people of Corinth, Paul stated that God “has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). The role of an ambassador is an important one. Ambassadors represent their leader and their nation or kingdom in everything they say or do. As ambassadors for Christ and his Kingdom, we do not have the freedom of expressing our own message. Our message is that of reconciliation between God and people.

Jesus, our high-road leader, expects us to live out high-road behavior with others in everything we do. Our world is filled with people who live on the low road. That’s understandable because our world is filled with sin and darkness. What kind of ambassadors are we if our actions and values as Christians are the same as those who have no relationship with God? When we live that way, how can we be a light in this dark world?

AMBASSADORS REPRESENT THEIR LEADER AND THEIR NATION OR KINGDOM IN EVERYTHING THEY SAY OR DO. AS AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST . . . OUR MESSAGE IS THAT OF RECONCILIATION BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE.

3. We Are Not Just Ambassadors of Christ—We are Chosen to Do Priestly Work

In his first epistle, the apostle Peter wrote to believers,

But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out

for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.

Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul. Live an exemplary life in your neighborhood so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.

(1 Peter 2:9–12, MSG)

Our role as Christians is to help people connect with God. It's not possible to do that if we continually draw lines, argue with people, and build walls between us and them. Jesus came to this earth to be on common ground with us so he could connect us with God. As his chosen representatives, we must do the same.

When we take the high road, we love and value people the way Jesus did. That will make us look at people with whom we disagree in a different light. C. S. Lewis said, "There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. . . . It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit."¹

Knowing that Jesus took the high road with everyone, and knowing he wants you to follow his example, what are you going to do? Will you follow in his footsteps? Will you embrace *all* of Jesus' values? Your values are more than just decisions; they are your soul. The values you and I live determine how we behave and how our culture will function—regardless of the laws we make. Matters of the heart will never be solved with legislative action. It's much easier to rewrite the laws of the land than to change the heart. It's also less effective. Poet and critic Samuel Johnson was right when he wrote,

"THERE ARE NO
ORDINARY PEOPLE.
YOU HAVE NEVER
TALKED TO A MERE
MORTAL."

— C. S. LEWIS

How small of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure.²

As people who have been saved by grace, we know that only Jesus can cure the human heart. And that is the message we need to pass on to others. How can we best do that? By following Jesus, our high-road leader.

Chris and I have spent our lives striving to follow Jesus and share his message with others. Like you, we want to be salt and light so others will have a relationship with Jesus. To do that, we must make people hungry, not angry.

We want to share with you eight behaviors Jesus modeled in the Gospels that have taught and empowered us to be salt and light to others. Each of us explores four of them. We do this because only Jesus can make us attractive to people who don't know God. Only when we follow Jesus on the high road in a low-road world will people want to know why we're different. We want to lead people to Jesus. That only happens on the high road where Jesus travels.

