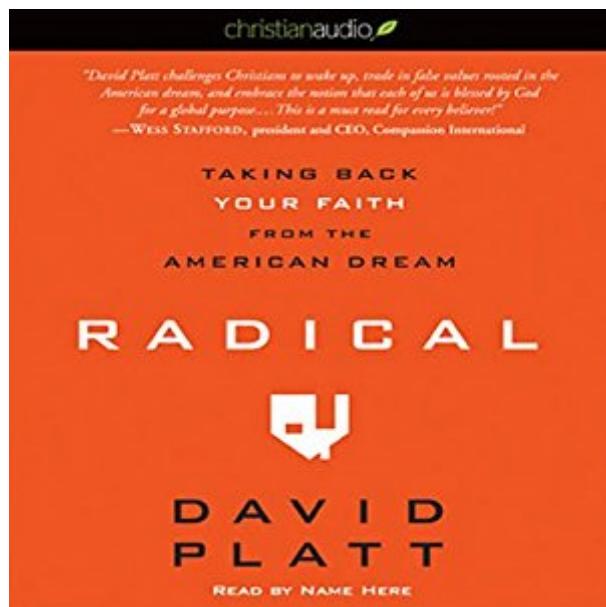


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# Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From The American Dream



## **Synopsis**

What is Jesus worth to you? It's easy for American Christians to forget how Jesus said his followers would actually live, what their new lifestyle would actually look like. They would, he said, leave behind security, money, convenience, even family for him. They would abandon everything for the gospel. They would take up their crosses daily... But who do you know who lives like that? Do you? In *Radical*, David Platt challenges you to consider with an open heart how we have manipulated the gospel to fit our cultural preferences. He shows what Jesus actually said about being his disciple--then invites you to believe and obey what you have heard. And he tells the dramatic story of what is happening as a "successful" suburban church decides to get serious about the gospel according to Jesus. Finally, he urges you to join in The Radical Experiment--a one-year journey in authentic discipleship that will transform how you live in a world that desperately needs the Good News Jesus came to bring. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

My first impression of "Radical," just from skimming the dust jacket, mirrored the critical review which has been deemed most helpful. I came very close to missing the blessing God had for me through this book. However as I read "Radical," reflected on its message, saw its impact on myself and my friends, and pondered the significance of this runaway best seller, my perspective changed completely and I was led to a deep conviction that God is working through this book in an unusual way. I subsequently volunteered to analyze and review the significance of "Radical" for "Mission

Frontiers," a major mission strategy magazine. [Google "Mission Frontiers Radical" for a more detailed analysis than fits here.] Before dismissing "Radical" based on nothing more than the plausibility of a negative review, I encourage you to use 's "look inside" feature or read the first chapter, available free on-line [Google "Someone Worth Losing Everything For"]. Instead of an "outsider" criticizing the Church, you'll find a well-credentialed insider inviting you to join his struggle to understand and close the gap between what he reads in Scripture and how we have redefined Jesus to affirm the way we live. A friend just read "Radical" and emailed me: "This book haunts me: 'My biggest fear, even now, is that I will hear Jesus' words and walk away, content to settle for less than radical obedience to Him.' - David Platt" **BOOK SUMMARY** David Platt's book "Radical" reflects a wider move of God through which He is stirring His people to live radically for Him to finish discipling all nations (Mt. 24:14 and Mt 28:18-20). "Radical" overlaps heavily with Francis Chan'sÂ Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless GodÂ in urging God's people to live "all out" for Jesus, but puts forth a much clearer picture of the global purposes which God is working to accomplish through His people, and a more practical suggestion for how God's people can begin intentionally engaging together in obeying God and impacting His world. In the first chapter Dr. Platt develops Dietrich Bonhoeffer's quote "[the first call every Christian experiences is] the call to abandon the attachments of this world." Throughout his book, Platt urges us to discover Jesus (not heaven) as our sole treasure, to lay aside everything that keeps us from pursuing Him above all else, and to realize that "It's Not About Me." [Google the free excerpt from "Radical" available on line at "Mission Frontiers Radical not about me".] The final chapter of "Radical" opens: "Throughout this book we have explored a variety of bold claims about our purpose in life that are contained in the gospel yet contradicted in the American dream. Claims such as these: Real success is found in radical sacrifice. Ultimate satisfaction is not found in making much of ourselves but in making much of God. The purpose of our lives transcends the country and culture in which we live. Meaning is found in community, not individualism; joy is found in generosity, not materialism; and truth is found in Christ, not universalism. Ultimately Jesus is a reward worth risking everything to know, experience and enjoy." Having presented such a challenge, Dr. Platt then takes a surprising departure which seems to have thrown several other reviewers. Instead of calling for immediate dramatic change, as most "high commitment" books do, he suggests the starting point of a growth path which any group can embrace together to pursue greater passion for Jesus and obedience to His global purposes. The "Radical Experiment" is not radical in where it starts, but in the direction it leads. It is much more like Jesus' initial call to Peter and Andrew in Matthew 4:19--to follow Jesus and let Him change us into effective disciplers--than it is to the kind of radical Luke 14 challenge I

and my missionary colleagues like to present. Like some negative reviewers, I was initially misled into dismissing "Radical" by the low initial commitment required in the "Radical Experiment." "What," I asked myself, "is radical about reading through the Bible in a year, or giving 2% of your time or to a specific cause?" But such a dismissal misses the whole thrust of Dr. Platt's book. "Radical" will challenge most readers in the healthiest of ways, not simply to agree with what is wrong with the Western Church, but to take practical steps to join others in living for God's global kingdom. As the Chinese proverb says, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." From the one out of eight reviews of "Radical" which are negative, it is apparent that:- some will read "Radical" as a guilt trip or an appeal for wealth distribution,- others will question Dr. Platt's motives, lifestyle or position, and- those who love money will mock the idea of living sacrificially as the Pharisees did. "The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus" (Lk 16:14 NIV). But those reactions seem generally to be the result of existing bias or careless misreading of the book. **WEAKNESSES** I find two major weaknesses in the book itself:1. Extracted from the caring tone of Platt's audio presentations, some will experience the book as a guilt trip. For those with an oversensitivity toward personal guilt for the state of the church, I recommend the audio versionÂ Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream, or the free original sermon series which I found much richer than the book itself. [Google "Brook Hills Media Radical"]2. While Dr. Platt effectively develops God's intention for those He has blessed to join Him in caring for the poor, inexperienced Western Christians far too often translate this simplistically as "giving to the poor." And this creates more problems than it solves. Unfortunately the current edition of "Radical" does nothing to address this problem (a later edit may), but to his credit Dr. Platt asks that all of his small group leaders read Fikkert and Corbett'sÂ When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty Without Hurting the Poor. . .and Yourself. **CONCLUSION** In my experience, "Radical" is most suitable for three audiences:- Those disillusioned with self-centered "Christianity Lite" will generally find "Radical" both challenging and refreshing.- Those who have never considered Biblical obedience as an alternative to self-serving religion will find "Radical" a healthy challenge.- Most real friends of the True King will find value in "Radical" and want to share it with others. [Toward multiplying the circulation of "Radical," "Mission Frontiers" has arranged a bulk discount for its reader. Google "Mission Frontiers Radical not about me"] "Radical" is NOT likely to be appreciated by those who are prone to feelings of guilt,- want to justify their attachment to the things of this world, or- are not prepared to give their lives to drawing close to Jesus and joining Him in His global purpose. For a mature discussion of the danger of some experiencing "Radical" as a guilt trip, see the concerns of Kevin DeYoung and the response he invited from Dr. Platt, which you can find by googling

"DeYoung Platt Root of Radical."REPRESENTATIVE OF THE IMPACT OF "RADICAL":The following edited story typifies the impact of Dr. Platt's message. [Find the original by googling "Platt foster care office"]:Dr. Platt asked a foster care office in Birmingham how many families they would need to care for all the children. They laughed. He asked again. They said 150 families. Platt preached on orphan care from James 1 (v. 27 in particular), and 160 families signed up to serve as foster care families.---Today, 11/7/2010, I have moved the following items to a comment under today's date:- my own transformation of perspective toward "Radical,"- how God is using "Radical" like He has used "Crazy Love,"- my unusual involvement in promoting "Radical," and- related free resources to help you live radically for our King. To see the kind of practical applications Radical is stirring, google "Waterbrook Multnomah Radical action plan."DISCLAIMER: I did NOT receive a copy of "Radical" or any other compensation for this review or any other analysis or promotion of "Radical." All of my research and endorsement of this book is a free gift offered in service to my King.NOTE: If you have found this review helpful, please register that with the button below.

Thanks!

I finished reading David Platt's book Radical, while waiting for a flight from New Delhi to Hyderabad, India. The book had been recommended to me by several friends, so I decided to throw it in my bag for my recent tour (training pastors in the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Kenya and South Africa). The book calls us to a much deeper commitment to following Christ, and reaching others - two themes that get my blood going. So thanks to David Platt for stoking the fire. For the most part the book accomplished its mission well. On the other hand, there were places where Platt got my blood boiling in a not-so-helpful way - a little too radical. In an effort to make his points, I felt that Platt pressed too hard, and stretched the supporting evidence. I would chalk it up to "too much of a good thing." Here are my (hopefully) gentle critiques:1. I feel like a radical life for Christ needs to be motivated by radical love for Christ. We need to be givers, but cheerful ones, not from compulsion. I felt there was a little too much compulsion in Platt's book. I didn't find much sense of cheer. While I can tell that Platt is on the move from his legalistic upbringing, I get the feeling that he has a way to go. At several points in the book I got the distinct feeling that Platt was preaching at me, instead of to me (maybe before the book went to print he had already received that feedback....he seems to apologize on p. 214). In my opinion there wasn't nearly enough of "the love Christ compels me" and a little too much of "come on, you guys, you should be ashamed of yourselves!" Granted, we all need a kick in the pants now and then, but there's a line we can cross where we can "exasperate our children," particularly if you are a child who wants to do what is right. Count me among the exasperated.2.

Platt tends to overstate things a bit in order to make a point, particularly in his chapter How Much is Enough, critiquing the American dream:a. "Caring for the poor is one natural overflow and a necessary evidence of the presence of Christ in our hearts. If there is no sign of caring for the poor in our lives, then there is reason to at least question whether Christ is in our hearts." (p.110)b. "If our lives do not reflect radical compassion for the poor, there is reason to wonder if Christ is really in us at all." (p.111)c. (on the story of Lazarus) "This story illustrates God's response to the needs of the poor." (p. 114)d. "Isn't the hidden assumption among many Christians in our culture that if we follow God, things will go well for us materially? Such thinking is explicit in "health and wealth" teaching, and it is implicit in the lives of Christians whose use of possessions looks virtually the same as that of our non-Christian neighbors." (p.117) For me, these overgeneralizations tended to lessen, not increase, the impact of his argument.3. Platt has problems with the American church and I share his pain. But while He diagnoses the disease as largely spiritual, I think it is largely sociological. The church turning in on itself is quite natural - it is what organizations naturally do. By virtue of being organized together, over time, we get to know each other. As we get to know each other we become aware of each others' concerns. As we become aware of each others' concerns, we create programs to meet those concerns. In the end, our own concerns end up being plenty to keep us busy, and the mission is largely forgotten. It is purely natural. Of course, God does not call us to natural, but to supernatural. What I see happening in the American church is not unspiritual as related to spiritual, but natural as related to supernatural. I think the hearts of most Christians are well-meaning. I think they are just trapped in a self-reinforcing system where they can't see beyond our own needs. If nothing else, I can see Platt's book as a huge favor to get us to look up and see there is far much more beyond ourselves.4. There is a lot of classic either/or (black/white) thinking in this book. For example, "We can stand with the starving or with the overfed. We can identify with poor Lazarus on his way to heaven or with the rich man on his way to hell. We can embrace Jesus while we give away our wealth, or we can walk away from Jesus while we hoard our wealth." I'm not sure that those are the only choices. There may be some other combinations or shades of gray, but Platt doesn't allow for the possibility of being interested in the plight of the rich man, only Lazarus. In response I would cite Jesus' second great commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself" and his great commission, "go into all the world." He could has said, "love your poor neighbor as yourself" but Jesus is interested in everyone, rich and poor, Lazarus and rich man. He could have said, "go into all the poor world" but Jesus is broad, not narrow, in his instructions. Jesus told us to go into all the socially and economically diverse world.5. It would be possible, not popular, to make the argument that the church has spent more of its efforts reaching the poor, than the rich. Perhaps not

in America, where the cost of the mega-model draws our attention to the rich suburbs (nearly all of the top churches in America being precisely located). But in other parts of the world, where poverty reigns, the church has done little to target political and business leaders, instead going to the people with the least power, and least ability, to change the system.<sup>6</sup> In some cases possessing great status and wealth may be precisely what God wants for a person's calling (see Joseph); at other times such wealth and status should be forsaken (see Moses). One size does not fit all. Platt carefully "cherry picks" the passages that fit his argument.<sup>7</sup> Platt tries to make me feel guilty for the price I pay for food, relative to "half the world struggling today to find food, water, and shelter with the same amount of money I spend on french fries for lunch." This is a superficial argument, and contrasts like this abound in our world. Having just come from the Philippines I could say that they are enjoying much better pineapple than I am where I live, and a fraction of the cost. In India, their transportation costs (per person/per mile) are pennies on the dollar. So? The cost of something on one culture, relative to another, is sexy not substantive.<sup>8</sup> Culture is water to fish. If you live in it, it's hard to describe; if you live outside of it, it's hard to understand. I wonder if the two-thirds world misunderstands America about as much as America misunderstands the two-thirds world, in their actual experience. If so, Platt seems to reinforce these misunderstandings. Many in the two-thirds world live very simple lives, with a daily diet of inexpensive rice and chicken. They do not have electric bills, insurance, health care, automobile repairs, college bills, a mortgage or debt. (Remind me again, who am I supposed to be feeling sorry for?) I guess what I am saying is that Americans are not nearly as "wealthy" as people think. At times, I have to say, when I travel in the two-thirds world, I don't feel as guilty, as I do jealous. I think they may be rich in ways that matter.<sup>9</sup> I think it is important to make a distinction between struggling and suffering. Platt makes no such distinction, putting the cost of daily living on par with how many children die of malnutrition every year. It seems to me that a believer's primary concern should be those who are suffering, a smaller subset of those who are struggling, and certainly a much smaller number than "half the world." Ironically, it is a particularly western point of view to blur the two. As Americans, we don't like to struggle (I think we think it is suffering), but sometimes we are spiritually richer for it. After all, it is in the Lord's prayer where we read, "Give us this day our daily bread." For most people in the world, this prayer actually makes sense, and the people praying it are blessed for doing so.<sup>10</sup> I think Platt's interpretation of the rich young ruler negatively colors his perspective on wealth throughout the book. I like that story a lot, but I don't come at it from a money-centric angle. Simply put I don't think Jesus talked with the man because he was interested in the topic of money. I think he talked with the young man about the topic of money because he was interested in the young man. This was a personal challenge that

came out of personal concern: "what do I still lack?" (what is in the way?). The answer? Whatever is in the way of him, and it could be (maybe often is) money. But Jesus made it clear in other contexts that it could be relationships (mothers, brothers, sons or daughters) or something else valuable to us, like our time, our job, or our ideas. It would be a mistake to say that money is everyone's issue, or every American's.<sup>11</sup> One question that naturally arises for Platt and his church, which is of the "rubber meets the road" variety: What are they doing with the greatest accumulated asset of their ministry - their multi-million dollar church facility? He is obviously aware of the question, but there is not even so much as an oblique answer ("Every Sunday we gather in a multimillion-dollar building with millions of dollars in vehicles parked outside" (p.115). Platt comments negatively on how much money has been spent by others on such edifices (I pastor a multi-national church where we spend 13% on facilities in the US and less overseas, so I appreciate frugality here). Platt even suggests downsizing our homes (something else I am all for). But Platt doesn't take his reasoning to its natural, radical conclusion: Shouldn't the church sell its "home" and give the proceeds to the poor? I raise the question, not because I think they should sell their building, because I'm not sure they should. I raise the question to point out that there are times where it is more strategic for the overall mission to keep an asset than to give it away. The old fable, "Don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg" comes to mind. At a certain point I don't become more effective for Christ without a car (or phone, or laptop, or roof over my head), but less effective. For example, I work closely with an apostolic leader in India, and I think he needs to have more in the way of resources, not less, even though his standard of living already exceeds that of most Indians. This makes me think that the real challenge - largely missed in Platt's book - is stewardship more than sacrifice. Shouldn't our objective be to steward the resources of the world, particularly our own, in such a way that we "seek first His kingdom and his righteousness"?<sup>12</sup> I wish that Platt would have spent more time on Christian strategies to relieve suffering, beyond "give more." What is a Christian strategy for alleviating suffering altogether, beyond writing a check? For those who "have something" to "sacrifice it" only addresses matters short-term. Shouldn't we consider Jim Collins' advice to "strengthen the core" while we "expand the frontier"? Doesn't justice need to be paired with mercy? While it in no way alleviates my moral responsibility to respond generously, even sacrificially, I believe that thoughtful people want to understand how their gifts are really making a difference. The situation in Haiti comes to mind, for example. If there is a gigantic hole in the bottom of the bucket, no matter how many resources we pour in the top, we are going to end up with an empty bucket.

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