

# Saints

BECOMING MORE THAN “CHRISTIANS”

ADDISON D. BEVERE



*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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*For Julianna*

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## FOREWORD

If you're anything like me, when you hear the word *saint*, you probably think of anybody but yourself. We picture stained glass windows depicting Peter, Paul, or Mary. We think of modern-day heroes like Mother Teresa who seem to transcend the rest of humanity. Yet the word *saint* is innately human; it tells the story of people so devoted to the person of Jesus that they served him with their whole selves, their true selves. The word *saint* has a deep-rooted history within the story of God's redemption and the fullness of life that he has for each one of us. A saint is someone who has been redeemed and found worthy by a perfect Savior.

The Bible refers to all believers as saints, yet we as a culture don't identify with that term. In this book, Addison Bevere brings this archaic term into the modern space as he invites us to reclaim and own the identity of saints as followers of Jesus. Addison's contagious curiosity and wonder will make you think of your identity in Christ in a new way. Claiming the identity of saint is not about how good a person each of us is—it is about the One who gave his

life for us, who deserves our worship, who loves us in all our humanity. *Saints* is a charge to become more devoted followers of Jesus by encouraging us to expand our view of God and surrender our tendency toward self-worship and control. By expanding our view of God and allowing more space for wonder and mystery, we experience the world through God's divine perspective; we begin to see our lives as glorious moments of God's grace.

Addison Beveré's authentic and wholehearted pursuit of God makes him the perfect author of this message. Addison models the life of a saint by following the words and actions of Jesus, proving that devotion to Jesus is a transformative and glorious adventure. The message of *Saints* is not about achieving perfection but authentically and intimately walking with God as his plans for you are fully realized in your life. Through his book and through his life, Addison illuminates that devotion to God is not about a loss of self but rather a true understanding and full recognition of the person God created you to be.

Our identity in Christ is about embracing our true and whole selves so that God's glory can be revealed through us. Anything less is false humility, which is on par with pride. This book will challenge and awaken you to the higher calling that God has placed on your life. Sainthood is about a life of humble devotion and obedience; it is about the wonder and glory that can be found in every moment of every day as we walk with God.

*To all the saints reading this book,  
grace and peace to you in Jesus Christ.*


*Mark Batterson*





# THE GOOD LIFE

*Good teacher, what must I do to experience life?  
You know, the good life? —Mark 10:17  
(my paraphrase)*



I recently found, hidden in plain sight, the secret formula for writing a bestselling book. Yes, you read that right. My discovery created a surge of power that I could hardly handle. It felt like learning the winning lottery numbers before the tickets had even been sold. Everything in my life was about to change.

Okay, I might've overstated a bit. It's bad form to begin with a lie, so I confess that I didn't actually find the secret sauce of publishing. But what I did discover is that many of the bestselling books have three things in common—three characteristics that undoubtedly help them climb bestseller lists and empty our wallets. Because I love books, I'm going to share my findings with you—just in case you want to write a bestseller one day.

First, use provocative language in your title—swearing is best. I could give some examples, but you get the idea.

Second, write a self-help book. People seem to like learning about themselves and finding ways to make themselves better. Go figure!

Third, include something about “the good life” in your title or subtitle. Those three words grouped together, in that order, seem to have a magical power. After all, isn’t that what we all want? The good life.

If the good life could be turned into a product, *everyone* would want a piece of it. Nothing would be more profitable. Can you imagine selling such a thing? “Get your good life and find everything humankind has wanted since the beginning of time. Adam missed it. Plato couldn’t find it. Nietzsche tried his best to give it words. The good life slipped through their fingers, but today you can have yours for a deal of a price!”

This may seem ridiculous and absurd, but entire industries (and religions) are built on our dissatisfaction with life. “Life-changing” products fly off assembly lines. We want the good life, and we’re willing to pay for it. We’ll drop thousands on anything that gives us even a taste of what we crave. (The credit card companies love this.)

The problem is we weren’t created for just a nibble of the good life; we were designed to enjoy the whole thing. And until life reaches into the deepest regions of our being, we’ll find ourselves disillusioned, annoyed, and victimized by the latest quack pushing life-changing gizmos and gadgets.



Our quest for the good life has led us into the information age. We are collecting and aggregating information at unprecedented rates, hoping that some data cluster will crack the code and unlock the next level of human existence. But there’s just so much data. So many podcasts to

listen to, books to read, TED Talks to watch, conferences to attend, people to meet, photos to take, experiences to have. With this abundance of data, how can we know when we're headed in the right direction?

Next time you're searching for a book online or in a store, take a look at some of the bestselling self-help books. You'll find books on organization, minimalism (my wife loves these), busyness, productivity, confidence, success, parenting, teamwork, sexuality, making money, managing money, investing money, printing money (you get the idea).

Many of these books have a promise. If you will just start doing *this*, your life will change for the better. One book will declare that less is the key to happiness, offering foolproof ways to manage your frantic pace of life and encouraging a divorce from busyness so you can enjoy an unhurried life, free from the tyrannies of incessant doing. But its shelf companion—collecting dust only inches away—will assert that more is, well, more, revealing never-before-heard-of tricks to do more with less time so you can accomplish more with the free time you have.

Hmm . . .



As human beings, we're chronic pendulum swingers. Our lives get too busy, so we make work-life balance our singular pursuit. Or we find ourselves complacent and getting soft, so we find countless ways to energize our vocations and pursuits. Each month it's a new diet, a new scheduling technique, a new productivity app, a new parenting method, a new religious experience—the list has

no end. We're chasing something we can never seem to catch. We're looking for something that's *other* than what we've known.

Now, don't get me wrong. I love learning new ideas and exploring great tools. From time to time I indulge in these "life-changing" products, and some actually do offer tips and tricks that help us manage our lives. But I've found that most products think too highly of their transformational power. They can help us manage life, but they cannot give life—even the best of them.

Despite their limited power, we still consume self-help books, TED Talks, courses, podcasts, and so on at a frantic pace. Why? Because we want what they promise. We want comfort, value, a good pace of life, success, better relationships, steamy marriages, kids who contribute to society. In other words, we want the good life. We want to feel alive. We want to be alive. But could it be that we're dissatisfied with what we've found because we're chasing shadows instead of pursuing the life we were made for?

Deep down, we know we are destined for more, and it drives us crazy.

## MORE TO LIFE

No matter how much we accomplish or experience, we all come back to this sense that *there has to be more to life*. And we're given a choice as we seek an answer. We can either build bigger, busying ourselves through greater exploits or distractions, or we can dig deeper, exploring the spiritual side of our humanity.

It doesn't take a genius to realize fulfillment isn't found in the conquest of the material world. Affluence and wealth do not guarantee happiness. And yet we spend much of our lives as slaves to our material gods.

Our other option is to come to a place where we acknowledge the existence of something greater *within* or *beyond* us—a transcendent source of the good life. But there's so much confusion in the spiritual world, the land of transcendence. As we dig deeper, we find that the word *spiritual* has been diluted to capture a variety of conflicting experiences, beliefs, and religions. It's been appropriated to prey on weak minds and desperate hearts. It's been detached from our everyday, material lives and often relegated to relics, holy buildings, or ephemeral fancies.

Even among Christians—a people group that supposedly represents almost one-third of the humans who call this planet home—there is contention around what our spiritual or religious lives should look like. You'll find countless opinions on how, practically speaking, our spirituality should shape our day-to-day lives.

Yet even in our differences, we Christians are all convinced that “humanity requires relationship with God before it can be itself.”<sup>1</sup> In *A Guide for the Perplexed*, E. F. Schumacher reminded readers that “the scholastics used to say: *Homo non proprie humanus sed superhumanus est*—which means that to be properly human, you must go beyond the merely human.”<sup>2</sup>

So what does it mean to go “beyond the merely human”? How do we tap into a new way of living that resonates with our irrepressible desire for something greater than

what we've known? How do we find a hope that infuses us with a purpose and an identity that satisfies our souls?

We start with knowing this: we were created for goodness and perfection. That's why we innovate, progress, and change. But if our progress loses its purpose, it cannibalizes our humanity, leaving us distracted and disoriented. If innovation and change are not fulfilling our need to connect, to belong, to express, to love, to feel alive, how can they satisfy?

## DEATH FOR LIFE

Jesus, the hero of the world's most well-known spiritual narrative, offers us a mysteriously clear path to the good life: "Anyone who doesn't pick up their cross and follow after me doesn't deserve me. If you find your life you'll lose it, and if you lose your life because of me you'll find it" (Matt. 10:38–39).<sup>3</sup>

To paraphrase: die to self, follow him, and in this journey of losing your life, you'll find the life you were made for. At first glance, Jesus's words seem harsh and antilife—I mean, what's up with all this talk about death?

But Jesus is not being harsh. He's simply stating a fact. Outside of him there is no life—only existence. We were made for life—the God-infused life. Until we experience this kind of life and make it our pursuit, we will find ourselves hopelessly dissatisfied with the status quo.

In the first chapter of Matthew, we find a clear description of Jesus's purpose: he will save us from our sins, keeping us from "missing the true end and scope of life, which is God."<sup>4</sup>

With Christ comes the miraculous gift of rebirth—of new life—an awakening from a life of shadows. Though humanity was made in God’s image, over the course of our existence, we relentlessly unmade ourselves. In our pursuit of life apart from God, we stripped ourselves from the source of life.

But God, the good Father, refused to let our mistake define us. In the greatest divine twist imaginable, he became a man to reclaim the life and purpose humanity had spurned. Jesus, the Son of God, fully man and fully God—not compromising his humanity or his divinity—has awakened our world from its slumber and offers us the chance to find the life we’ve been looking for.<sup>5</sup> Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger” (John 6:35).

For thirty plus years, Jesus walked this earth as a human being, revealing the only way to do life. He was a real person. He traveled to real cities. He died on a hill with a name. But his time on earth was just the beginning. His example was catalytic and unprecedented, but alone it wasn’t enough. If a mere model of right and wrong could engender change, his death would have been in vain. When he died, he sent his Spirit to teach us the intricacies of the art of living. That’s why his Spirit is the only One who can fill our spiritual vacuum, helping us become truly human.

### **WHAT MUST I DO?**

You *know* you were created for more than what you see; God did, after all, put eternity in our hearts (Eccles. 3:1). There’s an expansiveness inside us that cannot be denied.

That's why we're so eager to find a life that transcends what we now know. And while this eternal life is within us, it requires us to look beyond ourselves, admitting we're incomplete, which is not easy to do. Like Adam and Eve before us, we want to be like God apart from God. They were terrified of dependence, and so are we.

Let's look at one of Jesus's most famous conversations about finding life. This interaction was so memorable it was recorded in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18. Each Gospel captures different facets of the story, so in places I've combined all three accounts.

Our narrative begins with an eager young man. He is wealthy and possesses great status. He's young, rich, and famous. In other words, he's living the good life. Luke's Gospel gives us reason to believe he was also a synagogue official, a member of the religious elite. It's evident this man was important. And it's probable his fraternizing with the likes of Jesus was discouraged among his peers.

Yet here we find him in the dirt and on his knees, in public mind you, begging Jesus for answers. Mark's account also reveals that he ran to Jesus. In Jewish culture, such running was disgraceful and unfit for a man of his status. Clearly, this man was desperate and willing to discard decorum's demands. Upon capturing Jesus's attention, he implores, "Good Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"<sup>6</sup>

Let's break down this question. First, the rich young man (Richie, for short) honors Jesus by calling him teacher. He also sees Jesus as a good man, so he appeals to his goodness. Clearly, he respects Jesus and believes Jesus is capable



of giving him the answer he seeks. Otherwise, Richie wouldn't risk his dignity. Remember, this is risky business for someone of Richie's stature. Jesus is, after all, an unlearned man, a lowly carpenter.

Second, notice that Richie believes eternal life can be obtained by an act of goodness—and more specifically, an act of goodness performed by him.

Third, notice who the hero is. Based on how Richie positions his inquiry, he, once discovering the truth, would be the hero, the one who would right the ship. Jesus, the teacher, would point him in the right direction, but Richie would do all the heavy lifting.

Fourth, this man is seeking eternal life, something he has not attained but greatly desires. Richie, like all of us, has an innate dissatisfaction with the life he's known. I believe his desire was to experience qualities of the eternal in the temporal. As an educated first-century Jew, he would have been very familiar with the promise of God's Messiah and the eternal kingdom—a kingdom marked by peace, wholeness, and prosperity.

With that in mind, let's see how Jesus responds to such a noble request from this distinguished man: "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. If you would enter life, keep the commandments."<sup>7</sup>

I've always been puzzled by Jesus's response. It seems that Jesus is saying that he, the Son of God, is not good. But isn't Jesus one with the Father? So if the Father is good, wouldn't Jesus be good? And if Jesus and the Father are one, is not Jesus's response misleading at best and a lie at worst?

Let's reframe the interaction by answering this question: Is Richie appealing to the goodness of Jesus's humanity or the goodness of his divinity? Richie sees Jesus as merely human, so Jesus answers as any human must: "No one is good except God alone." Yes, Jesus was and is both God and man, but Richie saw only humanity. I'm confident Richie would have received a different answer if he had appealed to Jesus's divinity. As it was, Richie was not looking for a God to save him—he was looking for a man to teach him.

So Jesus plays Richie's game. Richie wants to use his goodness to access life, and Jesus indulges him by quoting the good law: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother, love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>8</sup>

Notice that Jesus identifies only behaviors, those that are evident to others. He doesn't address the condition of Richie's heart. He also doesn't reference any of the vertical commandments—the ones that cover our relationship with God.

Richie's next words reveal that his own perceived goodness was the god of his heart—an idol that he drew strength from. We now see that Richie was trying to leverage his goodness to save himself from the futility and emptiness of life apart from God's Spirit. He says, "All these I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"<sup>9</sup>

We now see both frustration and contempt in Richie's response. He's frustrated because Jesus isn't giving him anything new. He's contemptuous because Jesus is offering instructions that he apparently mastered when he was a wee child.

Here's the important question for us to ask ourselves: Why wasn't Richie relieved by Jesus's response? If he had indeed followed Jesus's counsel, then he was set. He had kept the law. Based on what Jesus said, eternal life was his, right?

But Richie knew there was more. He had mastered human goodness, yet it had failed to make him good. It had failed to perfect his soul. Deep down, he knew he was wretched. He knew he wasn't experiencing the promised life. He wrestled with emptiness and purposelessness. Richie had summited the mountain of human perfection and found it devoid of anything great. He could also sense that the only thing his climb had achieved was an awareness of an infinitely greater climb that still stood before him—one that would require something new. Something different. Something other and more than who he had been and what he had been doing since he was a child. But Jesus wasn't giving him what he needed to scale the great mountain of goodness, and Richie couldn't shake the sense that he still lacked something.

How does Jesus respond to Richie's frustration? With love. Jesus loves him by speaking heaven's language in words Richie can understand: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."<sup>10</sup>

Richie is sorrowed by Jesus's response, but I think he saw it coming. Jesus pinpointed a lack of goodness that our friend had been able to hide. Yes, Richie wanted to experience eternal life, but he could not separate himself from the comforts of his present position. To give up his goods

would be to part from his identity. At that time, one did not have status without wealth. Richie's wealth and possessions made him appear good in the eyes of others. He was still the hero of his story, so he needed to appear good. And what good is a man who has nothing?

Jesus brought him to the brink of death—death to self—and offered a ticket into the perfect life, the good life. But the man could not take the ticket—he couldn't take the ticket because it came from someone else. He wanted to be the master of his fate, the grantor of his goodness, and the prince of his perfection. He wasn't looking for a Lord and Savior; he was looking for a good teacher. So “when the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”<sup>11</sup>



How could Jesus let this man get away? Wasn't he a prime candidate for building God's kingdom? Did he not possess great status and resources that could be leveraged to impact lives for the gospel? Sure, he was a bit full of himself and too attached to stuff, but Jesus could fix our rich friend, right?

Everyone including the disciples were in shock. They probably compared themselves to Richie and found themselves lacking. Remember, these were the guys who constantly competed to be the greatest. I imagine Peter was threatened when Jesus invited Richie to follow him. This man seemed to have it all going for him: wealth, godliness, status, passion. But he went away because of his imperfection.

By the time Richie came onto the scene, the disciples had made a lot of mistakes, and Jesus wasn't reluctant to

point them out. These guys were a mess. That's why when Richie is dismissed, the disciples ask Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" (Matt. 19:25). In other words, "This guy was more perfect than any of us. Are we not to inherit eternal life?!"

Jesus replies to them, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (v. 26).

Eternal life cannot be accessed by our goodness but by receiving God's goodness. No matter how good we make ourselves, we cannot become what we were created to be. And we won't experience the good life we all want until we drink from its source. Likely Richie went home to his wealth, possessions, and status only to discover that he had tasted life and rejected it.

## THE THING BEFORE THE THING

Some people mistakenly believe the story of the rich young man is just about getting rid of wealth or material goods. But here's the thing: possessions are merely tools. They are neither inherently good nor inherently bad.

The thing Jesus wanted Richie to do was follow him. Selling his possessions was just the thing before the thing. Jesus knew the only way for this man to discover the good life was to follow him and learn the nuances and otherworldly subtleties of the God life—the life that gives up everything to have the one thing worth having. Richie's possessions were holding him back; Jesus offered freedom from their control.

Keep in mind, Jesus did not require all his followers to sell everything they had and give their possessions to the poor. Upon Jesus's death, one of his disciples—Joseph

of Arimathea—was granted an audience with Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Joseph was able to convince Pilate to let him bury Jesus’s body in his own tomb. I have no doubt that he paid a high price for Jesus’s body. In fact, the Bible calls Joseph “a rich man” (Matt. 27:57).

The point is that possessions can neither give nor take away life. They are products of life, not life itself.

We all have things before the thing. Things that keep us from experiencing what will make us come alive. Things that keep us from trading our lives for what matters most. Things that keep us from following Jesus and learning from him. To find life, you must place these things—your career, family, money, dreams, success, relationships—in their proper place. These things, while good, aren’t capable of taking you where you want to go. They do, however, travel well on the back of something greater.

## CRIMINAL

A thief—let’s call him Criminal—finds himself on death’s door. A lifetime of pain and disappointment plays in the theater of his mind. He has wasted his life violating others and is now found unworthy to live.

Out of the corner of his eye, he spots an outlet for his anguish. Desperate to numb his pain, he hurls insults at a guy named Jesus, the “King of the Jews.”<sup>12</sup> I imagine Criminal thinking, *I might be a criminal, but at least I don’t pretend to be the Son of God. This Jesus is even worse than me.*

But then something happens. Criminal sees Jesus do something he’d never seen before. He watches the Son

of God cry out for the forgiveness of his tormentors, even while they hurl insults and inflict unthinkable pain. In an instant, Criminal's eyes open—what he's seeing is beyond human.

Criminal realizes he has a front-row seat to the execution of Life itself.

Jesus's followers have hidden from the cross. Whether out of fear or pain, they can't stomach watching their Messiah murdered. But Criminal has no choice. His proximity puts him in the throes of grotesque glory. I imagine him, despite his pain, being transfixed by the Holy One. But then he's awakened from his daze. *What are these new insults I hear?* he thinks. He looks over to see the other criminal still mocking the Son of God. And this criminal isn't just mocking Jesus; he's also mocking his saving power—the very reason Jesus is on the cross.

I love Criminal's indignation:

“Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”  
(Luke 23:40–42)

These are this man's final moments. Breath will soon leave his body. Yet here we find him giving his last heave to defend innocence and request forgiveness. Criminal has become a new man. And at death's door, he has found new life—a life that can even energize his death.

How will Jesus respond to Criminal's swan song? This desperate cry from the man who was unfit to live? Jesus says to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (v. 43).



Criminal, just like the rich young man, sought the path to eternal life. But Criminal had no goodness to hold on to. He wasn't looking for a good teacher. He knew he needed a Savior. Two men, one pursuit, two very different responses.

So many of us miss out on life because we're looking for a better version of what we've known. But the good life we all crave is paradoxical—death to find life—and reaches beyond the wisdom of this world. And here's the reason: God's not interested in just giving us a better life. He's not a self-help guru who's looking to make a quick buck off our nominal improvement. God's in the business of lasting, holistic transformation for the sake of eternal vocation. He has given us a calling, identity, and community that reach beyond the here and now. Our souls long for this new way of living. It's too spacious for our world's temporal fillings. There's a new life that is found only in the awakening of our True Self.

That's why the good life isn't *something* you find; it's *someone* you become.

And it starts here, now. This new life dignifies time, space, and matter, igniting them with purpose. God loves our material world. He calls it good. He celebrates our advances in medicine, science, engineering, teaching, and



so on. But there's more than what we can build with our hands. And in the discovery of this *more*, our True Self comes alive in hope, promise, and purpose.

In the arms of this new life, you will find the power and the perspective to rise above the limitations of your present world and its ideas of goodness. By the power of God's eternal Spirit, you can become a Saint: someone whose life is marked by a hope and a purpose that astound our world and point people to the One who is life.

But here's the thing: we will not find the good life until we leave our notions of goodness behind. Paradoxically, once we reject our understanding of the good life, we will find ourselves overcome by new life. As we yield to the magnitude of this new way of being, losing our smallness in God's largeness, we will become people who participate in the mystery of life.

We will become Saints.



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