

LIVE LIKE JESUS



DISCOVER THE POWER AND IMPACT
OF YOUR TRUE IDENTITY

PUTTY PUTMAN



Chosen

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

Putty Putman, Live Like Jesus

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To Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,
and to my wife, Brittany, for being willing
to take this crazy journey with me.



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Foreword

About seven years ago, my then regional overseer in the Vineyard movement asked me to come and meet a young Ph.D. grad who was in his church and interested in the practical work of the Kingdom. He introduced me to Rob (Putty) Putman. Now, at that time, many people were asking me for interviews and ways to gain a better understanding of becoming practitioners of Kingdom ministry. I always assumed they were curious and dabbling. With Putty, it felt different. As you read this book, you will see what I mean. Putty is a gifted teacher.

Putty is deep and gifted at raising people up to understand the truth of the Kingdom. *Live Like Jesus* explores some of the hard questions we have all been asking (or have not realized we have been asking). Putty challenges us to step beyond what we have concluded or been told in order to see the work Christ has done and the life we are meant to live. You will see this early on, starting in chapter 2, his chapter on “The Gospel I Thought I Knew.”

Chapter 4, which discusses “The True Gospel” and how Jesus destroyed the works of the devil, is near to my heart, as I dealt

with this subject in my first book. Putty shares a side to this subject that will invite you to make this your life's work.

I could go on, but you need to explore this one for yourself.

As you read *Live Like Jesus*, you will be challenged and called higher to the realities that await us in this life of righteousness and true identity. Be prepared to be stretched and increased to live a life in the Kingdom that started and ends in deep relationship with the Father.

Loosen your belt, 'cause it is a full-meal deal. Then tighten your seat belt, 'cause it is quite a ride.

Robby Dawkins, international speaker
and ministry equipper; author, *Do What Jesus Did*

Acknowledgments

Creating a book is a large undertaking, and it is not a solo project. Many contributed to this book, in one way or another, and it would not have been possible without them all.

To my family: Brittany and the kids, thanks for being willing to give me up for all those blocks of time I spent writing and editing. They are coming to something at last! Dad, thanks for passing along a passion for the written word and for dreaming with me about publishing.

To my Vineyard family: Thank you for the journey of the last several years. It has been more exciting and adventuresome than I would have imagined. It is wonderful to be part of a community that continually presses in for everything God has for us. Hap and Di, thanks for modeling so many things incredibly for me: passion for following Jesus, leadership, learning, risk-taking and more. This would not be possible if you had not believed in me.

To the SoKM team and students: Thanks for pushing the envelope. The Lord has so many incredible things on the horizon for us. I love heading toward the future together. The

Acknowledgments

breakthroughs of the present and future will be more than worth the price we have paid to get there.

To the Chosen team: Thanks for taking a risk on my young voice. It has been a tremendous honor and a lot of fun to work with you. You have made this whole thing possible, and it has been a joy along the way.

There are doubtless many more I am sure I have forgotten. Thank you to each and every person who has been a part of this journey and who has held me up, one way or another. I could not have done it without you.



Welcome to the Journey

Linda had been a Christian for years, and she felt frustrated with God. She attended church every weekend unless an emergency interfered. She did everything she could to have the kind of relationship with God she believed was possible.

A wife and mother of two young sons, she and her husband had met years before, in college at a campus ministry. Ever since that time, more than anything else, Linda wanted to know what it was to be close to God. Her pastor shared about the value of reading Scripture and about personal devotion to Jesus, but something just never seemed to click. Every time she sat down to read the Bible, she found it confusing. Every time she reached toward God in prayer, she believed her words never went farther than the ceiling. She desperately wanted the *personal* in her “personal Lord and Savior,” but she could not seem to find it. God felt distant and confusing. She understood Him as an idea but could not find any relational connection with Him.

Steve was a rather successful businessman. He found out early in his career he had a knack for market positioning, and his recommendations often helped his employer, a software production company, increase their revenue by noticeable amounts. Over the course of several years, he advanced in his career to become the vice president of marketing and was doing quite well for himself. Along the way, a neighbor invited him to church, where he met and gave his life to Jesus.

Steve loved God and wanted to follow Him wholeheartedly, but he struggled to overcome a habit he had long fallen prey to: pornography. His battle with pornography had cycled on and off for more than two decades. He went long stretches living above it, but when situations provoked him to unusual anxiety, he ended up turning to porn to manage the anxiety for weeks at a time. He tried everything he could to get traction toward quitting, but nothing seemed to make a difference.

This weekend, Steve was traveling for work again. As the day dragged on, he noticed he was wrestling with the knowledge that at the end of the night, he would go back to his hotel room, where a television with multiple channels presented him with ripe opportunities to fall off the wagon again. He felt tired and weak—something he knew had caused trouble before. It would be a long trip . . .

Jackie had recently given her life to Jesus. She experienced a profound sense of purpose from her newfound faith and church family. Every day seemed fresh, and life was rich with possibilities. But as she began to experience a life lived with Jesus, she discovered she had difficulty wrapping her heart around the idea that she was fully forgiven. She had a rather checkered past before coming to know Jesus—one filled with experimentation with drugs, sex and other vices. In an effort to find meaning, she had explored Buddhist meditation, along with a smattering of other non-Christian religious practices. Her parents were

very moral and had instilled in her a strong sense of right and wrong. She wrestled with deep guilt, shame and regret for her prior choices. She knew she was supposed to be forgiven, but she did not seem to be experiencing that forgiveness. Why was it that after receiving the forgiveness Jesus offered her, she still felt as guilty as ever?

Phil and his wife, Sarah, had enjoyed a relatively positive marriage for the last 22 years. While they never had children, due to infertility, they were a good fit for each other, and the strong commitment they both felt toward Jesus and their church community cemented their life together.

Late one evening, their next-door neighbor, Angela, knocked on their door. As they welcomed her in, she was crying and shaking. They helped her calm down and asked her to explain what was happening.

“We got in a fight, and he finally decided he was leaving me . . . ,” she uttered between sobs.

Phil and Sarah knew Angela and Todd had been living together for the last three years and had married each other about six months prior when they discovered Angela was pregnant. Phil and Sarah sat there, uncertain how to proceed. They knew Jesus had given them a strong marriage, and they wished for some way to share that gift with others, but they had no idea where to start. In a flash, it became clear: They knew their faith should be able to bring real answers to the crises around them every day, but they did not know how that worked when the rubber hit the road.

Is Our Faith the Real Deal?

As a pastor, I encounter people with stories similar to these on a regular basis. Unfortunately, they resonate with many of us

more than we would like. While we may be committed to Jesus and the message of the Gospel, if we are honest with ourselves, we have some pretty serious struggles living the kind of life we see portrayed and promised in Scripture. We struggle with anger, fear, worry, lust, lying and the like. We feel pushed back and forth by our circumstances, or God feels distant. We begin to realize our faith consists more of a set of ideas than a real relationship with God, and when we bump into opportunities to share what God has given us, we often do not know how.

I would like to challenge you to do a reality check: Is this where you are? How satisfied are you with your Christian experience? Does it satisfy you, or do you feel like you are going through the motions? Do you feel content or frustrated? Fulfilled or lacking? Do not give me the religious-positivity answer. Be gut-wrenchingly honest. Is your faith everything to you that it seems like it should be?

What if I told you the part of you that feels like life is supposed to be thrilling and vibrant might be the Holy Spirit inside you, trying to move you to more? Many of us live with a gnawing sense that *there must be more to this whole Christianity thing than what I'm living*, but we cannot seem to find it. We stumble around and struggle to see how our faith is applicable, let alone exciting. At best, many of us live with a sense of discontent. At worst, we resign ourselves to a “this will have to do” posture toward our walk with God. We know it is the Good News, but if we are honest, it does not always feel all that good.

The issue usually is not our heart posture. More than anything, we want a life characterized by a rich and full relationship with God. We want our lives to be submitted to His purpose and to live in victory over sin. We want to represent Him faithfully in the opportunities we have. We love Jesus and want these things, but it seems difficult to get there. At the very least, it can feel like a three-steps-forward, two-steps-backward kind of

experience. If the life we believe is possible is not completely out of reach, it requires at least a tremendous process to get there.

Then, when we hit the point where we stop pretending this treadmill of faith is somehow satisfying us, we often turn our doubts inward: *What if there's something wrong with me? I must be a pretty lousy Christian. Maybe I'm not trying hard enough. Am I really taking this seriously?* These conversations with ourselves usually only convince us to try harder and to beat ourselves up more when we fail—which does not help much.

Eventually, even the promises of Scripture seem illusory. “His yoke is easy, His burden is light” must apply to everyone else, we figure. “More than conquerors” does not describe us, and being a “light to the world” will have to be handled by the rest of the Church. We resolve ourselves to a faith we feel is barely enough to get us by.

Yet there is a deep part of us that knows it is not supposed to be like this. We may not be able to find the road forward for ourselves, but we know, somehow, there is one. Our lives must be able to be richer and fuller than they are. And that is what makes the situation all the more frustrating. We hang on to faith in a better future, but we resign ourselves to the hopeless belief that there is no road we can find to get there.

Here is what Paul says about our life in Christ:

For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:10–11

Paul exhorts us that inasmuch as Jesus died to sin, we are to see ourselves that much dead to sin, and the extent to which He is alive to God is the same extent we are. We are dead to sin and alive to God if we are in Christ Jesus—yet if we are honest,

most of us feel like the opposite is true: We are alive to sin and dead to God. God feels distant, even unreal, but sin creeps into our experience all the time.

I want to be clear about this: *It does not have to be this way.* Paul points us to a reality that can be ours. The Bible is not lying when it invites us to the promises it proclaims. But the answer to getting there is not found in continuing to try harder to do what is not working. If we do not experience ourselves as “dead to sin and alive to God,” trying harder to be dead to sin and alive to God, just because we know we should be, will not get us any closer to it. That is usually our default, but it will only yield the same results, not new breakthroughs.

The first step is admitting that, for many of us, we are a long way from the kind of life Paul describes. And the road forward starts with taking a step back and rethinking things completely.

Could All of This Point to Something?

Let me suggest something radical. What if our problem here is different from what we think it is?

After struggling to experience the fulfillment we know our faith promises, most of us resign ourselves to this conclusion: *It doesn't work for me.* We are not sure what the disconnect is—if something is wrong with us or if we are simply not good at living this faith thing out—but it does not seem to be working in our lives. So, we relinquish ourselves to doing the best we can, and we try not to listen to that voice that would provoke us to find something different.

But what if that is not the real problem? What if the problem is not that there is something wrong with us or that we have an inability to live this out—but that we have not seen the whole

story in the first place? What if our problem is that we have been living with an incomplete Gospel?

Early Christians were first called “followers of the Way” (Acts 24:14 NIV). Our walk of faith is a journey—but like all journeys, to get to where we want to go, we need a complete set of directions. Without a complete set of directions, we will find ourselves taking wrong turns, driving in circles or running into dead ends, all the while getting more lost and frustrated.

Let’s say you and I want to go see a movie. We decide what we will see and what time we will meet at the theater. Since I have never been to that theater, you give me directions to get there. But before you give them to me, you delete half of the steps—you just remove them entirely. How is my journey going to go? If I make it to the movie theater at all, I am going to be angry with you and frustrated with the situation. I would bump into you in the ticket line and express, exasperated, “These directions you gave me were terrible! I had to figure it out on my own . . .”

You may respond, “Every step in those directions was true”—and you would be correct in saying so. The steps listed *were* accurate. But they were also incomplete. And that incomplete aspect of the directions created a major problem. I needed the steps you listed, but I also needed a few more. I needed the *complete* set of directions to get where I needed to go.

What if this is what has happened with our faith? What if the Gospel we have is not wrong but incomplete? What if we do not have all of the Gospel we need in order to live it out? Until we get those missing elements, we are not going to be able to arrive at the destinations described in the promises of Scripture.

Many of us are working hard to manage elements of our faith that do not seem to be working for us. Rather than stepping back and examining the directions that guide our journey—the Gospel—many of us are focused on managing symptoms. When

we spend huge amounts of energy resisting specific sin issues, we are managing symptoms. When we try harder and harder to connect with God in our times of prayer and reading Scripture, we are managing symptoms. None of this gets at the heart of the issue. But the symptoms indicate something is missing.

Let's try a different route.

This suggestion of a different route may come as a welcome relief or feel uncomfortable. On the one hand, it would allow us to be honest about where things are and how well our faith is functioning in our lives. Maybe we are not crazy. Maybe there is a reason it does not seem to be working. Maybe there is something we can do about it. Maybe we do not have to give up hope.

At the same time, what does it mean that the dearest beliefs we hold may not, in fact, be the whole story? What has been left out? What happens to our faith if we choose to let those beliefs shift?

In all likelihood, this news makes us feel both relief and discomfort. But however it feels, it is clearly an invitation into more.

The journey I describe in these pages is one I have taken. It has thrilled me, delighted me, often perplexed me and at times terrified me. It has shifted the core of my understanding of the Gospel—and therein lies the challenge. As soon as God begins to adjust our understanding of His good news, things start to get uncomfortable. I remember having some interesting conversations with God while on this journey: *God, I'm kind of concerned about these things You keep showing me in the Bible. I don't want to wind up a heretic!*

In the end, it came down to trust. Did I trust the Holy Spirit to adjust my truth, even down to my understanding of the essence of the Gospel? Could I let go of my understanding of His good news and let Him share it with me for Himself?

I thank God that He granted me the grace to walk that journey and for the life-giving understanding that came from it. Looking back, I would not trade it for anything. It has become a precious journey that God and I took together, and it is the journey I want to extend to you, as well.

I suspect you will begin to experience the same discomfort I felt. You may feel like what I present in these pages steps outside the bounds of the truth of the Gospel. You may think, as we talk, that I major on minor things and minor on major things. And that may be true—like you, I am on a journey, and I have not fully arrived. The only one who did on this earth was Jesus!

Even still, I urge you to examine the Gospel as you know it. If the Gospel is good enough that God Himself calls it the Good News, then it should probably be unbelievably, ridiculously good. Think about it. Would the best news you received in this last year have been big enough for God to call it really, really good news, let alone *the* Good News? Indeed, if the Gospel is really good news to God, it should be the kind of news that just a moment's reflection on it brings an unconscious smile to your face. It should be so good that remembering it on our worst days cheers us up. It must be so amazing that we spend the rest of our lives discovering how good it is, every day a discovery that it is even better than we realized the day before. It should be the kind of news we struggle to believe is true—in fact, the kind of news it takes faith to believe!

Most of us do not feel that way about the Gospel. Thinking of the Gospel may not cause our heart to beat a bit faster or our eyes to shine with excitement. But if the news really is the Good News, shouldn't it produce that response? We should not have to get ourselves excited about the Gospel. We should be enthralled with it!

Paul talks about not being ashamed of the Gospel:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Romans 1:16

I used to read that verse and feel a sense of burden—because if I was honest, I was kind of ashamed of the Gospel. I was not enthused about it. I read this verse as if it said, “A good Christian like Paul is excited about the Gospel, so if you’re not excited, figure out a way to get there.” Along with that would come feelings of shame and emotional burden.

Now I see I had that whole thing inside out. If I felt ashamed of the Gospel, then I did not have the Gospel that Paul did. This verse is not a command to get excited, but an invitation to come deeper into the truth.

What I ask of you as you read this book is twofold. First, entrust your understanding of the Gospel to God. It is His good news anyway, not yours. Give Him permission to color outside your lines if He wants to. You just might find He starts leading you into truth and setting you free.

Second, try not to let discomfort or personal history discount what we discuss. If we are talking about the heart of the Gospel, then our ideas, no matter how familiar, do not carry much weight. We should be concerned with what is in the Bible. My paradigm of the heart of the Gospel has not changed because of some experience I had—although, of course, there have been experiences along the way—but rather because God revealed things to me in His Scripture. Likewise, your point of view on the Gospel should be rooted in Scripture, not in experience. Our understanding should be in harmony with our experiences, but our theology needs to be grounded in the Word of God to be credible. That will be our concern in this book.

How Can We Get There?

For the first time, my experience of the Gospel is approaching what I described above. I find nothing more exciting to talk about, nothing more life-giving to reflect upon. The Gospel is no longer something I have to psych myself up about. It really is news so good that I struggle at times to believe God made it so good. It is incredible!

Here is a snippet of what the Good News looks like to me these days:

- The Good News is about more than just forgiveness. In fact, being saved has just as much to do with who I am as it does my heavenly report card. I am no longer looking for who I am. I am who God has made me to be, and I do not have to prove anything to anyone.
- God has eradicated everything in my being that fell at the Fall. I am no longer defined by Adam's mistakes. I am defined by Jesus' success.
- Jesus went so far as to forgive *everyone*, even those who never believe in Him. In case you are wondering, that does not mean everybody goes to heaven, but it does mean God has His arms open to welcome everyone home to Him. God is not angry with unbelievers. Instead, He watches for them to come home, like the good father of the Prodigal Son did.
- Jesus came not only to offer salvation to us, but also to kick off the story of the redemption of all creation. In fact, our salvation drafts us into the forces of light that push back the darkness in the world. We get to play the role we saw Him play during His life and ministry on the earth.

I know all that may sound crazy. It seems like some of those statements could not possibly be true. They are audacious—absurd! How could we believe those things about ourselves? It would be prideful to believe them, right?

These are the very questions I asked in my journey through this, and I do think it is important to ask them. However, if these statements are the truth revealed in God’s Scripture, then we have a responsibility to embrace them. After all, the Gospel belongs to Him, not us.

As we work through the questions that arise on this journey and we begin to see how all of this is rooted in Scripture, an amazing thing happens: Other parts of us come alive, and our heart fills with hope. Rather than feeling like a distant figure, God becomes alive and active. Our life begins to orbit around a new story: *I am who He made me to be.*

I cannot see myself now without seeing the work of God. As a result, my life and my journey are stitched irrevocably to Him. My faith has come alive in a way it never did before. One of my closest friends put it this way when he heard this truth for the first time: “It’s like being born again, again.”

Our hearts come alive as they resonate with the truth God has already written on them. Sin tendencies fall away. Jesus becomes a bigger and bigger part of our everyday reality and experience. Our struggle with God feeling distant vanishes, and our effectiveness for the Gospel skyrockets.

What if the Gospel is as good as God promises it is? Wouldn’t you want to discover that and live in light of it? What if you could live above sin because Jesus really defeated it? What if you could walk in close communion with God and be empowered to represent Him well? What if the exhortations to “count our trials as joy” became the sensible thing to do instead of feeling like an impossible standard? What if we could love ourselves without feeling like a disappointment?

I am increasingly convinced this is what a life with God looks like. Again, I love the way my friend expressed his experience of discovering the Gospel afresh: “It’s like being born again, again.” This has been the journey for me, as well. I have stepped into a whole new layer of belief and experience of my faith, and I have been freed in ways I did not know were possible. It may be hard to believe there is that much more available to you in your faith, but there is—and our journey through the rest of these pages will lead you there.



THINKING LIKE JESUS

- For many of us, the faith we experience often falls far short of what we see promised to us in Scripture.
- Rather than working harder at a faith that is not working, our understanding of the Gospel needs to be reworked.