

Crazy But True

Connected to Jesus for Life

Natalie Brand



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1 | Spirituality, Life and Death

THE alarm clock buzzes rudely and you bring your hand down on it a little too hard, letting out a long sigh. It is Monday Morning. You are facing another week. While you battle with your hair, make-up, and tights, all of which conspire against you, you try to think up a national emergency that would sanction a day spent in bed.

Yet soon enough you find yourself sitting in traffic, or at your desk, or standing yet again at the kitchen sink, and last night's sermon comes to mind: You think about the joy of the gospel you tasted, the challenges you felt, and you resolve to have a week really enjoying the Lord. You preach to yourself a little, ask God to help you stay focused, and get on with the day. But as you later snuggle down into your warm bed and reach for your Bible, you have a sudden pang of guilt: You've not had a God-thought all day!

We all struggle at times, wondering whether we truly *know* God. Some days we feel we are thriving in our relationship with him. But on others we are pricked with guilt because we are not yearning for God consistently

throughout the week. What can encourage us on these Monday mornings? Or maybe it is the mid-week drag that fills you with discontent? Or the worldly delights of a Friday night out with friends? *What can arm us as we face the diversions, temptations, and trials of the week?* Days when we feel depressed or distracted with the demands of our work or family. Days when our passion for the gospel has dried up in the reality of pleasing the boss, keeping the house clean, fighting intense loneliness, or trying *not* to fight with your husband or teenagers. Nights when we are seduced by materialism, glamour, and a life of pleasure: When suddenly the most important thing to us is, 'how do I look in this dress?', 'how do I compare to the other women in the room?', or 'is he attracted to me?'

Crazy Crazy Spirituality

We are living in a 'spirituality' craze. Many contemporary women seek something 'higher' or 'other' to give them peace and self-fulfilment. Our mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends are turning to new forms of meditation, yoga, or Buddhism. Others look to feminism or 'goddess' spiritualities, homosexuality, or a personal expression of self in transgender. We, as a society, are on a hunt for the 'spiritual' but we are no longer on a hunt for truth. The *X-Files* motif "The truth is out there" is no longer a concern in the twenty-first century ... that is so last century! Yet what we really need is not just some other spirituality but a spirituality based on truth.

Reclaiming the Vintage

As a fan of antiques, I love that it is now super trendy to reclaim vintage furniture with some new fabric and a lick of 'shabby-chic' paint. I always get goose-bumps snooping around antique shops and second-hand emporiums. My heart beats fast with excitement as I turn another corner in anticipation of finding some long lost treasure with its own secrets and stories. Just imagine a gorgeous vintage leather armchair hidden at the back of a dusty antiques emporium, hidden from view under a debris of tasselled cushions and washed-out curtains, waiting to be discovered for the gem that it is.

In all the new ideas on spirituality; the latest Smartphone 'app' or self-help franchise; what we need most is to reclaim a spirituality of truth. This little book is a rediscovery of a spirituality based on the truth of the Bible. Instead of swinging around aimlessly, trying all the different spiritualities and philosophies on offer, in these pages we will anchor spirituality on raw God-truth from God's Word. The Bible is like that vintage armchair; it is a profound treasure that our society has pushed to the backroom. Yet it is beautiful (in a goose-bumps kind of way) and deeply relevant to us women in the twenty-first century. So we will dive head-first (letting our brain do some work and not just our senses) into the theme of being joined to Jesus from the New Testament.

A Wooden Cross For Today

Most of us have heard the Christian saying, 'Jesus died for your sins'. Have you ever wondered what that actually means? How can someone else die for our sins? How

can a 2,000 year-old Roman cross in Palestine have any influence or power in our lives today? This book answers these questions.

Jesus of Nazareth ... the man who was pulled down from a brutal Roman cross after being nailed to it, hanging for hours in a state of asphyxiation, and stabbed ... died and was buried in a hole in a rock. Yet three days later he walked out! He died and came back to life. He was buried and raised. The Bible teaches us that if we believe in Jesus we are joined to him; his death becomes *our* death, and his resurrection becomes *our* resurrection. We become women buried and raised in Christ. Without this joining to Jesus the cross of Calvary would just hang suspended in history with no relevance to us at all.

Using This Book

In some chapters of this book we will particularly focus on the New Testament book of Colossians. This is because it is packed full of teaching on being joined to Jesus and how it shapes, not just our spirituality, but our whole lives. Colossians, a letter written to a church formed around the time of 52 AD, confirms that Jesus Christ is all we need in our search for truth. You see, the Christian gospel is not just about how Jesus can save us from our mess but also how he keeps us through all of life. If we are a Christian, he is in us and we are in him and he is *all we need*. This means we can live a life that really enjoys Jesus Christ; he is enough for our Monday mornings, our mid-week drags, and our Friday nights.

Spirituality, Life and Death

As you read this book, I hope you will get a lot out of it. Chapters 2–7 explore what it means to be one with the Lord Jesus and its personal relevance in our lives, while chapters 8 to 10 develop this in our ‘community spirituality’ in the church. Questions have also been included at the end of the chapters. Whether you are reading on your own, with a friend, or in a group, these can give you an opportunity for personal reflection or stir up further discussion, as well as offer you ideas on acting upon what you have read.

May you catch a vision of King Jesus in this book and grasp more of the crazy truth of being a woman connected to Jesus for life, walking in him every day.

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2 | Jesus is More Than Enough

IN the streets of Brighton the spiritual climate is high. Posters stapled to lamp-posts beckon those who pass by to meet a Psychic, visit a holistic healer, or attend a class in meditation or some other spiritual technique. There is a sense in the city that you can create your own spirituality in the pick 'n' mix offered.

During one short-break in the city, for a treat I booked my first massage. I found myself at a posh self-proclaimed 'urban retreat' called 'Body and Soul'. Inside I was greeted by stone statues from the Far East. Upon entering the dim room that was to be my sanctuary for twenty-five minutes, flickering candles welcomed me as soothing music played and the rich smell of oils filled my nostrils. The whole experience was tailored to promise well-being of mind, body and soul to women ... for a Visa or MasterCard payment. It was a massage for one's aching muscles but I could not help thinking that some women went with an aching soul.

This appetite for 'the spiritual' is not unusual to Brighton. A visit to your local bookshop will confirm the huge variety of products available in the 'Religion' or 'Mind, Body and Soul' sections. Beside books on Islam and Catholicism, you can also buy tarot cards, manuals on finding your 'inner spirit', manuals on finding your 'soul-animal', or your 'inner goddess'. At one large American bookshop I used to frequent you could even acquire a Hindu god with an accompanying textbook or a mini Zen gardening kit. Whatever your spiritual cup of tea, it's out there.

So spirituality has become pretty fashionable in our twenty-first century world. Sadly in all this desire for a personal spirituality that brings peace and happiness, the Christian gospel has been rejected. Today we want connection to a 'Higher Power' without traditions, rules, and responsibilities.

What are we thinking of when we use the term 'spirituality'? Of course, this is a subject under much debate. But here we will simply understand 'spirituality' to be the daily pursuit of the spiritual, that is, the *reaching outside of self for that which is seen to be ultimate*. As Christians, we believe the God of the Bible is THE ultimate being. Therefore, what we need is a spirituality that is solidly biblical and thoroughly reliable.

God's Word

These spiritual trends are confusing for Christian women. We all see what the world has on offer through the media and the latest craze talked, texted, blogged, or 'tweeted' about, but how do we filter these ideas? How do we know

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what is right and true or unhelpful and incompatible with the gospel? It is essential that we turn to God's Word. Only our Bibles can truly help us.

In their pages the eternal God speaks personally and powerfully to each of us. And in His Fatherly care He gives us answers and direction for the whole of our lives. Remember, as the Bible says of itself, 'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness' (2 Tim. 3:16 [ESV]). As Christian women living in today's world, the Bible is our own God-given resource for spirituality. Our lives should be shaped by it. If we have a spirituality based on something other than the Bible then it is dangerous.

The church in Colossae also struggled with novel ideas on spiritual life buzzing through their ranks. The Apostle Paul wrote to this new Christian community, living in what is now southern Turkey, in the New Testament letter of Colossians. Paul was painfully aware that these Christians lived in a Roman society with a multitude of 'man-made' ideas relating to the divine. Pagan deities and mysterious secret cults were the flavour of the day. Undoubtedly the Colossian Christians were finding it tricky to keep their heads above water and not be pulled under by those who mixed the gospel with other beliefs.

Yet some visitors had made their way into the church family and were disturbing the group with promises of deeper Christian experience and knowledge additional to, but not contradicting, the gospel. These false teachers had come amongst the church family claiming that they