



From the Manger to the Cross, the Men in Christ's Life: Matthew
by Kris Swiatocho
Editors note: This is a part of a series.

My stepfather is only one example of a man who has impacted my life as a result of his relationship with Christ. Throughout this series, I want to share with you about some of the other men who have impacted my life solely because of their relationship with Jesus. I believe as I share that you, too, will connect with them and discover for yourself how God has always had a plan for you, is working it out in your life and will never leave you.

Who are your friends? Last night I was talking with one of my friends. She said that she had gotten a new job and wanted to share with me about it. She was very excited and at peace. She and her husband had been struggling financially for quite some time. Due to our country's economic situation, her husband's job was eliminated. Because he is a draftsman for the housing industry, he has not been able to find work in over a year with the exception of a few freelance projects. In that year they have also had a child. He has become a stay-at-home dad while his wife works. She had been praying for a better job with more benefits to help her family.

We continued to talk about all of the details the job would entail and how things would be better for her. Then, what she said next really surprised me. She said, "Kris, I thought of who I could call to tell this great news and all I thought of was you, as I don't have any friends anymore." "No, that can't be true," I responded. She went on to say, "No, seriously, I don't have any friends anymore." To that I said, "Well a lot of times when you get married your friends change." Both she and her husband got married in their late 30s, so most of their friends are still single. They have not really had the time to pursue new married friends, plus the fact they are struggling financially (so you aren't going out as much) and emotionally (not a lot to give out to others) hasn't help either.

We then discussed the purpose and value of friends. I told her that I have had so many people come in and out of my life. When I was young, and people left my life, I always assumed I had done something wrong. I would spend so much energy trying to fix whatever was wrong only to end up in the same place, without them. I simply could not figure out why some "friends" would leave me. I thought if you were a friend, it was for life. Sure, I knew some things could change the friendship. For example, when my friends get married, I expect to not see them as much and especially if they have kids. Then there's also the fact that they move not only within the same city, but also out of state. But what about the others? The ones who are still in your life such as those you go to Sunday school or small group with or who are in the same circle of hang-out friends. Why would those friends stop being friends?

I told her that I figured it out a long time ago. Our friends are not about us. Well, I mean, yes, there is to some degree it is about us as the Lord didn't leave us on this earth to be alone but in community. But, the reason we have friends is more about HIS purpose versus our own. I learned if we are really here to have a relationship with God that glorifies Him—and as a result of that relationship, a relationship with others—then guess what? Our friends will change.

Now sometimes "we" are the ones who cause the relationship to break up, and we should do whatever we can to reconcile. But what I am talking about here are the friends who simply disappear. You stopped e-mailing each other, stopped having lunch, stopped playing golf or going to the movies. Just stopped.

Why Lord? Why did they leave me? What did I do wrong? Guess what? Nothing. You did nothing wrong. Get this: if you are going to have room to make new friends, for His purpose, then some of the old ones have got to go! Ugh! We were not put on this earth to live in a bubble with the same set of friends our whole life. Even Andy Taylor from The Andy Griffith Show changed friends. Even Barney left Andy.

When we begin to understand that our rotation of some of our friends is for His purpose, we can handle the change much



better. I personally have several layers of friends. I have one who I talk with almost every day (sometimes for a minute and sometimes for an hour). Then I have one who I speak with every three to four days. Then I have several I speak with or check on every two weeks. Then I have many, many friends who I stay in touch with through Facebook and other social networks. I have had the pleasure of reconnecting with so many old friends, allowing opportunities to share about my relationship with the Lord. I also have a personal prayer team for my ministry that allows others to stay in touch with me. I have some friends I have known for years, even since childhood and some I just met a week ago. All are at different levels of trust and commitment on both our parts, but all are for His purpose. So when they leave my life, I don't get too upset as I know God is bringing me someone new.

This leads us to the story of Matthew. Jesus always called His disciples one by one. His invitation was personal versus yelling out into a crowd or sending a bulk e-mail. We know that Matthew is a tax collector. In Bible times and also today, a tax collector wasn't anyone's favorite person. They had bad reputations. Who wants to be a friend of someone you know could financially ruin you—someone who is watching every dime you make and every dime you spend? It would be one thing if they were all honest people, but in those times they weren't and no one wanted to be around them—except Jesus.

Jesus knew who Matthew was. In his sin, where he was, Jesus called him to follow him and he did. Matthew didn't have to fix his life, clean it up, and change his profession to follow Christ. Although as a result of following Christ, things would change (as with us all). After Matthew's conversion, the next scene shows Jesus and the disciples at Matthew's home for dinner—dinner with not only Matthew, but other tax collectors and sinners, including the Pharisees. The disciples were asked by some of the Pharisees why Jesus was eating with these sinners. Jesus told them that he had come for the sick not the healthy.

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners?'" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:9-13)

What I Have Learned from Matthew:

1. Matthew was obedient. Matthew, like all of us is "called" by God into a relationship with Him. The Lord chose us. Matthew didn't have to choose Christ, though. Matthew showed me that he was obedient to the Lord, that when the Lord is calling any of us that we should follow—not only in our salvation, but also in our ministry. Maybe he has called you to the mission field in your hometown or abroad. Maybe he's called you to sell your home and give it away. Maybe he's called you to teach Sunday school or start a ministry. Maybe he's called you to reach out to someone, to make a friend.

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him (Matt. 9:9)

2. Matthew had courage. Wow, so what did it take on Matthew's part to stop what he was doing and follow Jesus? Matthew was a tax collector, so he was probably wealthy. He was also smart and could easily have reasoned why he should not follow. He was willing to give it all up. He was willing to risk what his friends might have thought. I think deep down inside that Matthew was unhappy and he knew his way wasn't working. Sure, from the outside he looked happy but something was missing in his life. Jesus would give him the answer he was wanting. A new life. A life filled with peace, direction and purpose. Don't you want that life, too? Is there something you are still holding back from the Lord? Have you accepted the Lord into your life? Has God asked you to give something to him that you are holding onto? Maybe an addiction, an attitude or someone you care about who is wrong for you?



I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death (Phil. 1:20).

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Heb. 12:1-3).

3. Matthew taught me about hospitality. Our homes are not just for us to enjoy, but we are to share them. Christian hospitality has nothing to do with what we have but who we are in Christ. I have stayed in some of the simplest homes—homes that were filled with love and kindness. Clean sheets, tasty food and lots of hugs. Don't allow what you don't have to keep you from sharing what you do have. Sometimes it's all about offering a cup of coffee and a listening ear.

Matthew also taught me the importance of opening my home to not only those who are saved but also young Christians, lost people, and even my enemies. Take time today to plan a dinner. Invite your neighbors, your drycleaner, your dentist, etc. You never know the impact you will have on their lives.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples (Matt. 9:10).

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:12-14).

4. Matthew taught me about following Christ. Matthew was now a disciple. He was willing to be known as a follower of Christ. When he opened up his home, he would be announcing his allegiance to Christ. He took the risk of what that meant. He was even asked the question of why "his teacher" would eat with tax collectors and sinners. Now perhaps this question was not ask of him personally, as he was a tax collector, but he was there when it was asked. It was at the point that Matthew could not be on the fence. His "yes" needed to be a "yes" or his "no" a "no."

In what areas of your life are you still straddling the fence? If you were in a public place where there were lost people and perhaps some saved ones, would you be willing to say whom you followed? How about when you fly on an airplane, at the doctor's office, at your workplace, at your kid's school, or at your gym? If you were to hear an off-colored joke, or received an e-mail that was crude or were asked to go see a movie that was inappropriate, would you be willing to stand your ground and align yourself with whom you followed? Now don't get me wrong, sometimes we stay under the radar and wait for an opportunity to share our faith when the timing is right. I am not talking about those moments. I am simply saying that Matthew, at this particular time, would be put out in front as to whom he was following. Would you be able to do the same?

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" (Matt. 9:11).

Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one (Matt. 5:37).

5. Matthew taught me about Jesus' real purpose. That dinner was just a place to announce it. Those lunches, coffee meetings, the gym, game nights, conversations at work, etc., are all for the purpose of the Kingdom. Jesus came for the lost, the sick, the empty and the broken. If we only have dinners, game night, golfing, fishing and shopping with those who are saved, then how are we ever going to reach the lost? Are having times with saved friends important? Yes, by all



means, as Scripture talks about this a lot. But we must not live in a box with everyone around us who is just like us. First, we don't grow as our measurement becomes each other. Second, we aren't being obedient to God's Word to reach others for Christ in all the world. Jesus didn't worry what people thought about Him, about who He associated with. Jesus knew his purpose on earth. Do you know yours?

Matthew also taught me that Jesus was the Great Physician. He is the only one who can heal us. Even if His power is used through others, it is still HIS power and we need to give him credit for it.

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick (Matt. 9:12).

6. Mathew taught me that Jesus wants us to continue to live a life of action. Our walk with the Lord is fluid. He wants us to move toward Him. He wants us to learn. His desire of us is that we would want to give back out of obedience and love, not due to some kind of ritual or law. We shouldn't tithe or serve down at the local mission or donate our used clothes to a shelter because we feel we should. We should do it because of the love from the Lord and from that love, that our faith will produce action (works). Sacrifice means nothing if it is done for the wrong reason. Jesus didn't come for the ones who felt they are following the law perfectly, for they think they are just fine and don't need a Savior. He came for the ones who know they need a Savior because their way isn't working.

What about you? How is your life in Christ? Has it become the same old routine week after week with the same results? First, acknowledge that you need the Lord every day. Ask the Lord to change your heart. Ask the Lord to change your attitude. Ask the Lord to give you the courage to share your faith. Grow close to Christ and as you do, your walk will change. Your life will have purpose. You will want to tell others about Christ, because you will finally get what He did for you on that cross.

But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13).

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:17).

So I continued to talk with my friend about "friends." I told her that I was honored that she thought of me as a close enough friend to share her good news. But I also shared that her life had changed, and as a result her friends had changed—that right now in her season of life she wouldn't have as many friends due to her time limits. I also explained that there are different kinds of friends. I know she was missing those close ones who you talk with every day, hang out with, shop with, etc. But for now, perhaps God is asking her to make new friends, different friends. Perhaps those who she won't be able to hang out with for her own needs. Maybe friends who just need a cup of coffee and a listening ear.

How about you? Who are your friends? Who are those in your life who people might question? What is the purpose of the friends in your life? Matthew took a risk to make new friends for the Kingdom. Will you?

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you (John 15:15).

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Day Experiment, was co-authored with Dick Purnell of Single Life Resources.

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FromHisHands.com Ministries is Kris's speaking ministry. If you've ever heard her speak, you know that Kris is the kind of speaker who keeps the crowd captivated, shares great information and motivates people to make a difference in the lives of those around them! She speaks to all church audiences on everything from "first impression" ministry to women's topics to singles and young adults. She can speak on a Sunday morning, at a woman's retreat or for a single adults conference. Bring Kris to your church today!

Singles and Relationships by Kris Swiatocho and Dick Purnell

Many singles are Christians who wonder if God will ever bring a mate their way or if they should just stop focusing on a future with a marriage partner and live the single life to the fullest. Kris Swiatocho and Dick Purnell offer solid biblical answers for singles in this newest title in Dick's popular 31-Day Experiment Bible study.