

CHAPTER 4

TRANSFORMED BY THE REAL JESUS

The longer you look at Jesus, the more you will want to serve Him in His world. That is, of course, if it's the real Jesus you're looking at. Plenty of people in the church and outside it have made up a 'Jesus' for themselves, and have found that this invented character makes few real demands of them. He makes them feel happy from time to time, but doesn't challenge them, doesn't suggest they get up and do something about the plight of the world. Which is, of course, what the real Jesus had an uncomfortable habit of doing.¹²⁹

– Bishop N T Wright, professor of New Testament and Early Christianity and author of over 70 books

Once we've acknowledged the depth and breadth of the damage caused by worldly success, perhaps we are ready to discover Jesus' definition of success. The real Jesus contradicts worldly success and redefines success through His unique life and radical teaching. But as explained in the previous chapter, we all struggle with blind spots, blind guides and conflicts of interest. We don't approach Jesus or His teaching neutrally. We bring our questions, presuppositions and misconceptions.¹³⁰ I believe we are all tempted to make a 'Jesus' to suit our values, culture, perspective, preference and lifestyle. We want a Jesus that makes us happy and comfortable, and essentially one that we can control.

Have you encountered the real Jesus?

To redefine success according to Jesus, we need to encounter the real Jesus. He must become our most significant guide and the ultimate influencer—because all others have blind spots. This chapter will explore how important people in our lives, often inadvertently, impose their harmful definitions of success. Then we'll see the uniqueness of Jesus and examine three barriers which we must overcome to encounter the real Jesus. Interacting with the real Jesus will inspire and motivate us to replace worldly success with His definition of success. Our lives will then be transformed by the real Jesus, as experienced by billions of people, including a violent opponent of Christians, a Taliban soldier and people like me.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

We all want to be a success in the eyes of that special someone or 'significant other', and I mean more than the 'romantic other'. Anthony Campolo, professor of sociology and author of more than 35 books, asked, *'What is it that makes some people feel successful—in spite of the fact that the world in general declares them to be failures, while others have a sense of failure—in spite of the fact that the world thinks them successful? The answers to these questions lie in one important truth: **We are successful if the most significant people in our lives deem us successful**'.*¹³¹ (emphasis added)

We will always be driven by those we love, admire or follow. It is a powerful motivator. We intensely long for that smile, nod, look of approval or hug. Words of commendation such as, 'Good job, well done, you're the best and I'm proud of you' light up our hearts. When we feel we have measured up to their expectations, we feel loved, secure and successful. Conversely, criticism, scorn and expressions of rejection are damaging to our self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. It was this way for me.

For many years I studied intensely to earn my dad's commendation, and Campolo's statement applied to me: *'Perhaps we all know a man who has accomplished great things, but lacks any sense of self-fulfilment because he has not achieved success in the eyes of his father'*.¹³² I finally felt my dad's approval and pride in me when I graduated as a medical doctor. But that didn't last long.

Some years after graduating, I believed Jesus was guiding me to leave my medical career in Australia and train in a Bible college in Kenya to serve as a church minister in Africa. When I explained this to my dad, I could

see his high perception of me, the accomplished doctor, plummeting into disappointment. I perceived that in his view, I was a fool to throw away a prestigious and financially secure career. (Years later, I discovered that we had miscommunicated, and we eventually reconciled. You'll read about it in Chapter 12).

But when I went to Kenya, I felt misunderstood, rejected, alone . . . and a failure in his eyes.

Decades later, after returning to Australia, I experienced more similar pain when I perceived my son thought of me as a failure compared to the dads of his friends. The issue was our home. When we bought our house, we wanted to stay close to my parents in Sydney and limit our borrowing. We settled on a simple, three-bedroom, fibre-board house. By the time our son was in primary school, he was embarrassed by our home. Almost all his friends lived in better houses, some on the waterfront with beautiful views. He expressed his feelings along the lines of, 'Dad, I wish you had stayed working as a medical doctor in Australia because then you would have earned a lot of money and we could buy a bigger and better house, two storeys, with a swimming pool and you could buy me . . . (he had a list)'.

My perception that both my dad and my son, decades apart, thought of me as a failure for not continuing as a medical doctor in Australia brought significant pain.

INFECTION FROM OTHERS' HARMFUL DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

Our feelings of success or failure are directly related to our definition of success — and those we empower to define success for us. As admirable as some of those people may be, they too struggle with blind spots and harmful definitions of success. They can end up imposing them on us, and we suffer. Because we love the people behind those definitions, we accept them, or we might be unaware of the harm. We, in turn, pass on and impose the damage of worldly success on others. I confess doing so to my children.

In the human heart, there is a thirst for approval, a desperate hunger for acceptance, a longing for belonging. As children, we tried to please our parents and their disapproval hurt. Teenagers and young adults tend to seek peer approval, to be cool and part of the 'in' crowd and conform. No one likes to be thought weird, to be socially outcast, to be ignored or discounted. For us who are followers of Jesus, the tragedy is when others' approval has more weight than Jesus'.

As social beings, we desperately need approval from those we love and admire most. Therefore, I don't think it is possible to redefine success by yourself. We need support from others, and we will discuss this in Chapter 11, when we examine redefining success in community. But we can begin to break the vicious cycle by taking these significant steps:

1. Identify the people we have empowered to define success for us.
2. Identify and refute their harmful definitions of success.
3. Encounter the real Jesus and discover His radical definition.

MISSING OUT ON THE REAL JESUS

Who is Jesus?

Search for Jesus at Amazon.com, and you'll find over 100,000 books. Google 'Jesus' and in a second, you'll get 1,100 million results. I understand there is not a consensus about Jesus and some readers might be questioning His uniqueness. Some might not be convinced that Jesus should be a significant other, authoritative guide or influencer. Other readers, including some who go to church, may know only information about Jesus but are equally missing out on the benefits from a living and active relationship with the real Jesus. I invite all readers to explore the uniqueness of Jesus before we tackle the barriers to connecting with Him.

Lee Strobel was an atheist and spiritual sceptic who ruled out any possibility of miracles and the resurrection. Then his wife started following Jesus. The ensuing positive changes in her character prompted him to use his legal training from Yale Law school and journalism experience to systematically search for the real Jesus. He writes:

After nearly two years of studying ancient history and archaeology, I found the evidence leading me to the unexpected verdict that Jesus is the unique Son of God who authenticated his divinity by returning from the dead. It wasn't the outcome I was necessarily seeking, but it was the conclusion that I believe the evidence persuasively warranted.¹³³

Strobel subsequently wrote *The Case for Christ* that became a New York Times bestseller (more than 5 million copies sold) and was made into a major movie in 2017. His life's work, including more than twenty books and

speaking engagements, is to share the evidence that supports the truth and claims of Christianity. See leestrobel.com

In his book, *The Case for the Real Jesus: A Journalist Investigates Current Attacks on the Identity of Christ*, Strobel invites readers to set aside their preconceptions and let the evidence take them wherever it will, as he had done himself, then to examine the oldest and most reliable first-century eyewitness-based reports—the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He is hopeful readers will discover the real Jesus who is uniquely divine—both fully God and fully human; who offers forgiveness, hope and eternal life as a free gift to all who want to receive it. Strobel asserts Jesus is ‘*alive and well as he dwells in the lives of his people*’.¹³⁴

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS

As a junior doctor, I admired and learnt a lot from medical specialists who impressed me with their knowledge and ability to remain calm under life-and-death pressure. A few, however, repulsed me with their arrogance. As junior doctors we were competent, but still, some of our seniors denigrated us. Ironically, even while I was being humiliated by the few, I found within myself a similar pride stemming from being a doctor. I was becoming more irritable and looking down on others. Pride is the natural consequence of worldly success. I disliked the occasions I was puffed up with pride and asked Jesus to help me. Observing my arrogance and the conceited specialists made me appreciate how Jesus was such a stark contrast!

Unlike so many of today’s world leaders, CEOs, celebrities, sports stars or entrepreneurs, Jesus was not caught up in His public relations or marketing tweets. He didn’t need admiration, applause and ‘likes’. Instead of demanding to be served, He served others. John, one of His closest followers, recorded that Jesus voluntarily washed their dirty, smelly feet.¹³⁵ What leader does that now? As a doctor, I disliked examining diseased feet even with gloves on (and I was paid!).

Jesus displayed true humility, kindness, and grace. He was always compassionate, attentive, other-focused and a light and hope in the darkness. Jesus was unique in so many ways.

I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I founded Empires. But

*on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love, and to this hour, millions of people would die for Him.*¹³⁶

– Napoleon Bonaparte

The Gospel accounts reveal Jesus to be a breath of fresh air, surprising, innovative, unconventional and unlike the Messiah they envisaged. He did not attempt to be popular among the powerful. Those who refused to budge from their preconceived ideas of the Messiah completely missed Him. Jesus confused the religious leaders by loving everyone, including the despised nobodies of this world — the orphans, widows, foreigners, tax collectors, prostitutes, even the enemies of His people. At that time, people believed sin and shame were contagious and transferrable through physical contact. Yet Jesus conveyed compassion, respect and acceptance by touching the diseased, defiled and demonised.

John Dickson, Australian historian and author of 18 books, proposes the following in *Jesus: A Short Life*:

*Jesus apparently thought that purity — his purity — was a more powerful contagion (if that is the right word) than sin. When Jesus invited sinners to dine with him, he was confident that the welcoming grace of God would overwhelm, and therefore transform, those who ate at his table. He believed in a kind of ‘contagious holiness’.*¹³⁷

Jesus was tempted in every way. At the beginning of His ministry, during the 40 days He was in the wilderness, Satan offered him all the kingdoms of the world. “I will give you authority over all of this,” said the devil, “and all the prestige that goes with it. It’s been given to me, you see, and I give it to anyone I like. So it can all be yours . . . if you will just worship me.”¹³⁸ Jesus resisted. He could have lived extravagantly or have been narcissistic like other leaders of His day. Yet He was not corrupted, not even slightly tainted! When the crowds wanted to crown Him king, He refused because that was not God’s plan.¹³⁹ He could have travelled on a majestic stallion or in a grand chariot, yet He walked everywhere. On the single occasion He rode an animal, it was a donkey and it was to fulfil an ancient prophecy about Him.¹⁴⁰

Jesus could at one moment engage with the top religious experts on controversial and intellectual topics and, soon after, bring smiles to children. He didn’t disparage others to bolster His sense of self. His security, identity

and self-worth were not dependent on others or circumstances and didn't fluctuate according to their praise or numbers. After being cheered by thousands, He taught hard sayings that prompted most to desert Him. Even to the wealthy young ruler who could have been His sponsor, Jesus did not soften His teaching and went to the heart issue, *'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'*.

Many people, including Christians, take Jesus' unique claims and qualities for granted. Buddha taught a way to enlightenment but never professed to be God.¹⁴¹ Muhammad declared that he was a prophet or messenger from God, but not God Himself.¹⁴² Did you know, no other founder of a major religion made the same claims as Jesus? His distinctive and matchless claims include the following:

- He is God.¹⁴³
- He was sinless and could forgive sins.¹⁴⁴
- He died for the sins of humankind and came alive again.¹⁴⁵
- He is the way, the truth and the life.¹⁴⁶

Understandably, many contemporary religious leaders considered Jesus arrogant, delusional or blasphemous. They would have been right to do so if He failed to back His claims or practise His teaching. Yet Jesus provided evidence for every single assertion. He healed all kinds of diseases, fed a crowd of over ten thousand, walked on water, calmed storms,¹⁴⁷ cast out demons, taught with authority,¹⁴⁸ revealed secret thoughts¹⁴⁹ and raised people from the dead.¹⁵⁰

Jesus repeatedly challenged the strictest religious experts, His enemies, who were trying to prove that He had sinned, and they failed. They could not come up with even one example!¹⁵¹ While Jesus was humble, He was no doormat. He confronted and corrected religious experts and others of high status, risking their ire and retribution. When the Roman soldiers came to arrest Him, He spoke to them with such authority that they *'drew back and fell to the ground!'*¹⁵² Jesus freely chose to be arrested. He had predicted His arrest, crucifixion, burial and resurrection.¹⁵³ Following His execution, His lifeless body was placed in a tomb. On the third day, He walked out of the grave.¹⁵⁴ His resurrection was a sign that His crucifixion was not a mere political assassination or a tragic accident, but in His own words it was *'to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'*.¹⁵⁵ It was the ultimate victory over sin, death and all the forces of evil.¹⁵⁶

I acknowledge that some readers may not be convinced of the resurrection of Jesus. There are many books, including by Jewish scholars, on this subject. For now, let me quote Dickson again:

*We do have just the sort of evidence a resurrection would leave behind: an empty tomb and numerous eyewitnesses, several of whom died for the claim. This is why historians take the resurrection story more seriously than many of us realise. They agree that something very strange happened—that there is a resurrection-shaped dent in the historical record.*¹⁵⁷

Catholic New Testament Professor Luke Timothy Johnson emphasised that ‘*the “real Jesus” is the one who is now alive and powerfully present, through the Holy Spirit, in the world and in the lives of human beings*’.¹⁵⁸

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- *Who have you empowered to define whether you are a success or not?*
- *What aspects of your significant others and influencers, such as character, qualities, love, wisdom, relationships, choices and lifestyle—are worthy of emulating?*
- *What might be some harmful definitions of success you are receiving from them?*
- *What would it take for you to consider making Jesus your most significant guide and ultimate influencer?*
- *If you are already following Jesus, who or what might be exerting more influence on your values, ambition, choices and lifestyle than Jesus? What would it take for Jesus to top all others?*

THREE BARRIERS TO CONNECT WITH THE REAL JESUS

Now, let's explore three barriers to connecting with the real Jesus—rational, emotional and social.

BARRIER 1: RATIONAL

Lack of Information

At Sydney airport, I noticed a young man who looked lost and offered help. It turned out we were on the same flight. Arriving at Brisbane, he didn't know how to get to his motel. My friend agreed to give him a ride. While we waited for our luggage, we chatted about ourselves and our families. It turned out he was from Iran. During the drive, I asked, 'Do you know Jesus?' He answered, 'I'm from Iran, and we are Muslims . . . I don't know much about Jesus.' He did not seem to know that Jesus claimed to be God and proved it by being sinless and performing miracles. I was able to share with him that God loved him so much that He sent Jesus to be crucified; that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all the shame and guilt of sin. He seemed surprised and I encouraged him to read the Gospels.

But you don't have to be from the Middle East to be uninformed about Jesus and His claims. So many in the West, including historians and scholars, fail to acknowledge Jesus.

*So profound has been the impact of Christianity on the development of Western civilisation that it has come to be hidden from view.*¹⁵⁹— Tom Holland

In *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*, award-winning historian Tom Holland asserts that many of the values and laws highly esteemed in the West can be traced to Jesus, including that of humanism, a value system underpinned '*ultimately from claims made in the Bible: that humans are made in God's image; that His son died equally for everyone*'.¹⁶⁰ Holland claims that we have a tendency to take for granted as universal the radical and unprecedented impact of Jesus, so much so that, in relation to Jesus being tortured to death on a cross, most people in the West '*are dulled to just how scandalous it originally was*'.¹⁶¹

Dr Peter Jensen, retired Archbishop of Sydney, demonstrates in *The Future of Jesus* that Jesus is unknown and unacknowledged, even while He is, paradoxically, well-known.¹⁶² When four of Australia's brightest and best—

historians, lawyers and Harvard graduates—wrote a book called *Imagining Australia: Ideas for Our Future*, they failed to give Jesus credit when they cited His words ‘a house divided against itself cannot stand’.¹⁶³ They also referred to a deeply-held Australian value, ‘the modern fair go demands that we **should do unto others as we would have done unto ourselves**’ (emphasis added) without acknowledging Jesus as its author. As Jensen writes, ‘Here again there is the utterly unconscious quoting of Jesus as a source of modern secular values’.¹⁶⁴ Jesus remains widely unacknowledged as the source of many of the beliefs, values and ethics held in high esteem in modern Australia.

Misconceptions—Ours and Those of Our Significant Others

Misconceptions about Jesus are prevalent. Our significant others, family and friends may intentionally or unintentionally pass theirs on to us.

Becky Castle Miller, an American pastor living in the Netherlands, grew up in a Christian environment. But later she came to realise she inherited some misconceptions. She disclosed:

What is the difference between a Christian and a follower of Jesus? There shouldn't be one.

But in practice, often there is. We ‘Christ-ians’ don’t always follow the one whose name we bear. I know, because I’ve called myself a Christian for thirty-three years, but for long stretches of that time, the religion I practice had little to do with Jesus . . . Even though I knew all about Jesus, he got awfully buried under ‘Christianity’ and the rules that went along with it.¹⁶⁵

Miller went on to describe her experience,

*I began deconstructing and reconstructing my Christianity. Through that whole painful process, I learned what Christianity was really about. It’s not about a set of inward beliefs and outward cultural religious practices. It’s not about safety, and it’s not about rules. It’s about being transformed inside and out into knowing, thinking, feeling, acting, and loving like Jesus. In other words, being a Christian is about **actually following Jesus**.¹⁶⁶*

Blind Spots and Distortions to Fit Our Cultural Biases and Lifestyle Preferences

When I visited museums and churches in Peru, I was struck by so many paintings and statues portraying Jesus as a baby or dying on the cross. Few were of the resurrected Jesus, victorious over sin and death. One museum guide explained, ‘We’ve suffered so much from colonialism and oppression. We

want a Jesus who suffers with us. We don't feel victorious'. I have observed that many people who seem to view Jesus primarily as the Christmas baby are missing out on experiencing His resurrection power in their lives.

Throughout history, every generation and community is vulnerable to interpreting His words according to their cultural values and aspirations.¹⁶⁷ We unconsciously or deliberately distort His personhood and message to suit ourselves. We all face the same life-threatening temptation described by Platt:

We are starting to redefine Christianity. We are giving in to the dangerous temptation to take the Jesus of the Bible and twist Him into a version of Jesus we are more comfortable with.

A nice, middle-class, American Jesus. A Jesus who doesn't mind materialism and who would never call us to give away everything we have . . . A Jesus who brings us comfort and prosperity as we live out our Christian spin on the American dream.

But do you and I realize what we are doing at this point? We are molding Jesus into our image. He is beginning to look a lot like us because, after all, that is whom we are most comfortable with. And the danger now is that when we gather in our church buildings to sing and lift up our hands in worship, we may not actually be worshipping the Jesus of the Bible. Instead we may be worshipping ourselves.¹⁶⁸

BARRIER 2: EMOTIONAL — HURTS AND FEARS

Doctors Muriel I. Elmer and Duane H. Elmer are veteran educators with over 50 years' experience in over 75 countries. In their engaging and foundational book, *The Learning Cycle*, they emphasise the critical role of emotions in learning and changing:

*To think of emotions as a mushy, unpredictable detriment to learning would be a serious, even dangerous oversight. And yet, that was a rather common assumption in the earlier years of education and remains in some circles. The advent of brain research brought a serious rethinking of the relationship of emotions and learning. Emotions are, in fact, the **gateway** to the kind of learning we all aspire to achieve with our students. . . . Emotion, once thought to be located in one area of the brain, is actually distributed across seven areas. Interestingly, each of these areas is activated during learning sessions, meaning that emotions and learning are very closely tied.¹⁶⁹*

They described research which demonstrates that when the pleasure centres of the brain are active and the person is experiencing positive emotions, the rational part of the brain, including reasoning, thinking and logic, also becomes active. Conversely, when the fear centre of the brain—the amygdala, primary location for negative emotions—is active, the rational part of the brain tends not to engage except in extreme threat situations. Thus, negative emotions hinder learning.¹⁷⁰

What does this have to do with our interactions with Jesus?

We might be afraid that someone so powerful as God could be against us. Or we might be angry with God for our suffering and the mess and injustice in the world. If we or someone close to us have been hurt by Christianity, the church or religious leaders, we might be tempted to blame Jesus. It is understandable that people who have been wronged feel antagonistic. Terrible and shameful things have been done by Christians, even by priests, ministers and leaders. My plea is for you to recognise that these behaviours are against all that Jesus taught and lived. If you have been deeply wounded, I understand it will take a considerable effort to give the real Jesus a chance. But I hope you will, because the real Jesus feels your pain. He really does! He suffered and was crucified at the instigation of religious rulers. Try venting your sadness, hurt and anger, no matter how intense, to Him. His arms are always open wide. He wants to comfort you and give you His peace. He wants to journey with you in your healing.

BARRIER 3: SOCIAL — TRADITIONS, CULTURAL BIASES AND LIFESTYLE PREFERENCES

For some people, their significant others might not know the real Jesus or may disapprove of or oppose Jesus. Religions, traditions, cultural biases and lifestyle preferences might present significant social barriers to someone wanting to learn about and connect with the real Jesus.

Esther Ahmad's story illustrates these barriers and how Jesus overcame them. In her gripping book *Defying Jihad*, she recounted that at the age of 18 she volunteered for Jihad: to die and kill for radical Islam. She was motivated by the promise of great reward in heaven for her and her family. Having suffered her father's rejection, Jihad was also the key to win her father's love and approval. But two nights before she was to leave for her mission, Esther had a dream. She was in a graveyard and saw a light that shone brighter than anything, like the sun in full blaze, yet she could look at it. *'As the light came*

closer, I saw that it had a face, hands, and feet. It was not just a light; it was a person. A man. And He was speaking to me, “Come and follow Me”. Though Esther refused the first and second invitation, the third invitation was softer. Warmth and love flowed with the words, ‘My daughter, come and follow Me’. As she followed, the graveyard fell away. A crystal ocean of brilliant light replaced it. When she woke up, for the first time in her life, she felt peace.¹⁷¹

Against all odds, Esther became a follower of Jesus. Her father became furious. With his friends, he planned to kill her to restore the family’s honour. Her mother warned, ‘They’ll give you such an exemplary death that nobody in Pakistan will ever try to follow your footsteps’.¹⁷² Her mother and Christians helped her escape. Eventually, she reached Malaysia and was a refugee for eight years. Today she and her family reside in America.

Jesus says to all of us, ‘Come, Follow Me’

To redefine success according to Jesus, we need to be prepared to suffer disapproval from people who don’t follow Jesus or from devotees of worldly success. But as social beings, we need community. If you have suffered rejection or persecution, I hope you can find a community of Jesus’ followers.

CONNECTING WITH THE REAL JESUS

In addition to specific ways to overcome each of the barriers mentioned, there are four steps to help us connect with the real Jesus and be transformed by Him:

ADOPT THE POSTURE OF A LEARNER

The first step to acquire any new knowledge, wisdom and skills is to acknowledge that we don’t know everything.

The first time a friend invited me to play squash, I didn’t know the rules or strategy. I began by acknowledging that I was unconsciously incompetent, meaning, ‘I don’t know what I don’t know’. Watching other people play looked far easier than playing. Bumbling along was humbling, but I persevered in learning and practising. Decades later, I enjoy playing squash and can play without a lot of thinking.

We also need to be alert to our misconceptions and be open to having our blind spots exposed. Suspend judgment and seek to understand the teaching and wisdom of Jesus. Read the Bible as a learner.

ASK JESUS FOR HELP AND COURAGE

As Becky Castle Miller admitted, even Christians have misconceptions about God and the Bible. These hinder us from knowing the real Jesus. I did too. We cannot overcome the barriers on our own. We need help from God and others.

When I was in high school, our church hired a new youth pastor. He inspired me to read the Bible more seriously. Unfortunately, I was reading it while holding on to unhelpful misconceptions about the Bible — that it was about people I couldn't relate to because they lived so long ago. It had too many irrelevant rules. Possibly my most significant misconception was about how to relate to God. I thought I had to 'get my life right' before I could come to God. I had to attain 100 percent before I would be worthy to approach Him. How daunting and draining!

Despite my efforts to be a better person, I continued to struggle with pride and rebellious thoughts. Envy and lusts lingered. Even good deeds could not replace my guilt and shame with forgiveness and honour. It felt like I had a contagious and deadly disease—fancy clothes might cover it, but my body was dying. After years of trying to get it right (and obviously failing), I felt spiritually and emotionally exhausted. I came to admit I had nothing left to rescue myself. I can't recall the exact words, but I cried out to God, something simple like, 'Lord, save me.' I experienced in a new way His forgiveness and cleansing and a growing motivation to live less for myself and to love Jesus and others.

I also asked Jesus to heal my emotional wounds from bullying and being treated as an outsider. Jesus meets us at our point of need. He touches our hurting parts and our confused minds. It's challenging to describe the process of healing. Some elements of the recovery seemed as if Jesus touched the wounds and most of the pain went. Like when I suffered appendicitis—a few weeks after surgery, I was pain-free, and the disease no longer affected me.

Most of His healings were similar to the months of painful physiotherapy and excruciating exercises after I had shoulder repair. The progress was slow and painful, but eventually, I regained full function. Similarly, our cry for help is not just once and for all. Daily and each moment, we need His revelation, healing, wisdom, love and power. You will read in Chapter 7 that dependence on God is one of the essentials to redefine success and also how I overcame certain fears in my life. We need His courage when 'redefining

success' includes disappointing or contradicting our important others and their harmful definitions of success.

APPLY THE BIBLE WITH ALL THAT WE ARE

To be transformed by the real Jesus, we need to apply and practise His teachings. It begins with reading His words with all that we are. More than our physical eyes, we need to engage our spirit, mind and emotion. As you read, engage your imagination and feel the impact. Often it is helpful to read it out loud or to be standing and moving. From the next chapter, let's discover Jesus' definition of success and apply it to our lives.

LEARN, CHANGE AND GROW IN COMMUNITY

By definition, we cannot identify our blind spots by ourselves. Jesus transforms us in His community. In addition to receiving Jesus' healing and help, our youth pastor and followers of Jesus at church and university guided me to read and study the Bible. Christian counsellors provided insights and support that contributed to my emotional healing. As I connected with the real Jesus, He empowered me to be a channel of His wisdom and love. Then I was able to help others. Let's participate in a community of faith for mutual support and accountability.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

What barriers might be hindering you from encountering the real Jesus?

What is your relationship with Jesus now? Possibly one of these describes you:

- *You have not met the real Jesus.*
- *You have not experienced His transforming power.*
- *You might have been disappointed with Jesus or you have turned your back on Him.*
- *You have been a Christian but cannot describe where Jesus has radically transformed your hurts, perspective, values, goals and lifestyle.*
- *You desire more intimacy, healing and empowering.*

Jesus knows precisely your attitude towards Him. He invites you to be honest with Him. His arms are open wide and He invites you to come to Him . . . just as you are.

Will you give Jesus a chance to touch you at your point of need—where you are deeply hurting or where you might be confused? Cry out to Jesus and He will answer.

CONSIDER OTHERS WHO HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED BY THE REAL JESUS

When he lived on earth, Jesus never went outside geographical Palestine and Egypt. Yet today, over 2.5 billion people claim to be Christians.¹⁷³ The diversity of ethnicity, culture and nationality of His followers is also an expression of the uniqueness of Jesus. There are Christians in all nations, but in a few countries, they remain hidden for fear of death. Some people might be surprised that, globally, the majority of Christians do not live in the West. Two-thirds live in Africa, Asia and South America.¹⁷⁴

Jesus has transformed enemies, sceptics, cynics and ordinary people. He can transform your life too.

A terrorist who became an evangelist

Did you know the Apostle Paul, writer of many letters in the New Testament, had been a religious extremist who engaged in terrorism against Christians? Before meeting Jesus, he had been named Saul, a zealot radicalised to hate and despise all who followed Jesus. Being a front-row spectator at the stoning execution of Stephen, a disciple of Jesus, fuelled his hatred. He heard there were Jesus' followers in Damascus, so he journeyed to find and imprison them.¹⁷⁵

On the road, Jesus appeared to Saul in a blinding light and spoke to him. Shocked to face the living Jesus, the very person he had cursed and reviled, Saul abandoned terrorising the followers of Jesus and became one of them. Upon his repentance—the total turn-around of his life—Jesus renamed him Paul. The persecutor of Jesus became His promoter. The extremist became the evangelist. Paul's hatred was replaced with love¹⁷⁶ and a willingness to lose his ambition and life for the One whose name he had previously despised.

A Taliban soldier transformed by Jesus

In my travels, I met a once-hardened Taliban soldier who had harmed people. He was genuinely remorseful of his past and did not want to talk about it. At the same time, I observed and felt his palpable sense of joy, mainly when he spoke of meeting Jesus. It had happened in the mountains of Afghanistan.

Out of nowhere and unexpectedly, Jesus started 'appearing' and speaking to him. He had dreams and heard occasional voices while he was on patrol or on watch. He just knew it was Jesus. From the Koran, he had been taught Jesus was a prophet. He gradually started praying to Jesus in secret and eventually came to believe Jesus is God, Lord and Saviour.

He knew he could no longer be a Taliban soldier, but he could not simply resign. A soldier who wanted to leave the Taliban to become a follower of Jesus would have been executed. Incredibly, God provided a way of escape and he eventually gained asylum in a Western country. Now he radiates peace and love as he talks about Jesus, who rescues and transforms lives.

I have met women and men from China, Libya, Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan and Iraq who are now devoted to Jesus, but giving details might endanger them.

The life transformation of the Apostle Paul, Esther Ahmad, and the Taliban soldier began when they met Jesus and started listening to His words. Let's follow their example and discover Jesus' radical definition of success.



ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS

To counter harmful definitions of success, we need to be asking better questions.

Harmful question: Why not follow the ways of the wealthy and prosperous?

Better question: Do the ways of the wealthy lead to real life? Why not follow someone who lived consistently, loved you and died for you?

Harmful question: Why not follow the popular celebrities, leaders and influencers, irrespective of their character, values and practice?

Better question: Why not listen to and follow Jesus who backed up all His claims and consistently glorified God and loved others?

Harmful question: Why not live for the present because no one knows what's beyond death?

Better question: Why not listen to someone who died and came back to life?

DIGGING DEEPER — FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

To help you encounter the real Jesus and connect with him engage with the following questions personally. Then act on them and discuss them with others.

1. What are three highlights or take-aways from the chapter?
2. Review or discuss any question in 'Making it Personal', especially how to act on your growing conviction.
3. Identify and list the 'significant others' in your life. How do they define success?
Have you, like me, disappointed someone close? How can we be true to Jesus when the cost is to disappoint our significant others?
4. What's so unique about Jesus that 2000 years after He died, He can make a difference in our lives?
5. Which characteristics, attributes, teaching, miracles or actions of Jesus impress you?
6. What are the sources of your knowledge and experience of Jesus? Maybe put a percentage to each possible source:
 - What you've heard from family
 - What you've heard from friends
 - What you've heard from church
 - What you've heard from Christian speakers
 - What you've heard from social media
 - What you've read from books about Jesus or other topics
 - What you've read in the Bible
7. Jesus stated many seemingly audacious claims, making Him either a lunatic, a liar or the Lord. What conclusion might you lean towards?

REDEFINING SUCCESS ACCORDING TO JESUS

- a. What are the contributing factors to your leaning?
- b. Who or what events might have influenced you to lean in that direction?
8. NT Wright asserts that plenty of people have made up a 'Jesus' for themselves . . . who makes few real demands of them and doesn't challenge them.
 - a. In what ways do you think churches have 'domesticated' Jesus, making Him safer and less confronting than the Gospels depict Him?
 - b. Where might you have done that?
 - c. How and where is Jesus challenging you?
 - d. How are you responding?
9. How could our churches recapture the real, biblical Jesus—in all His wonder, other-worldly, unique, confronting, winsome, and indescribable ways?
10. The Apostle Paul, Esther Ahmad, the Taliban soldier, myself and so many other people experienced Jesus transforming their lives.
 - a. How about you?
 - b. Where have you experienced the transforming power of Jesus?
 - c. Where might you ask Him to transform you?
11. List three action steps you will commit to doing to be responsive to the real Jesus, e.g. identify a few of your misconceptions of Jesus; read one of the gospels — maybe a few chapters each day — to listen to His words and observe His life; open your emotional wounds to Him; ask for His help.