

WHY NOBODY WANTS TO BE AROUND CHRISTIANS ANYMORE



AND HOW 4 ACTS OF LOVE WILL
MAKE YOUR FAITH **MAGNETIC**

THOM & JOANI SCHULTZ

Best-selling authors of *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore*



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Why Nobody Wants to Be Around Christians Anymore: And How 4 Acts of Love Will Make Your Faith Magnetic

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INTRODUCTION

**THERE'S ONE THING YOU NEED TO
KNOW ABOUT US BEFORE READING
THIS BOOK. WE ARE CHRISTIANS.**

That's a pretty loaded statement. The word "Christian" means many things to different people. Some of those connotations are very positive. But, unfortunately, for many the word is highly negative. Like it or not, recent studies and surveys tell us the majority of people view Christians as judgmental, condemning, hypocritical, and—in too many ways to count—unloving.

We can all wring our hands or make excuses or try to defend ourselves. Or we can change it.

We recently released a book that challenges churches to focus on loving God and each other over, well, everything else. It's called *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore: And How 4 Acts of Love Will Make Your Church Irresistible*. As expected, it touched a nerve (actually, a *lot* of nerves), and we've been overwhelmed by the response. One of the most frequent comments goes something like this: "I didn't want to like this book. But now I'll never look at church the same way again." Whether people were inspired by it or troubled by it, the book tackled a topic that readers couldn't ignore.

But it didn't end with churches. Again and again we heard from readers who said they wanted the 4 ACTS OF LOVE for their family, workplace, and other relationships. They realized if those Jesus-based principles could

revolutionize the church, surely those same principles could transform individual Christians too.

We wrote this book because people asked for it. They've heard and experienced first-hand the sad stories of unloving believers, and they ache for change. They realize Christians are no longer known for their love for one another. If the word "Christian" is a loaded word, "love" is even more so—to the nth degree. So we decided to dig even deeper into these four ultra-practical acts of love and how they will change you, your relationships, and your world. They really will.

Why should *we* write this book? Why *us*? It's pretty simple: We're just regular people whose lives are filled with relationships. And we have a fair amount of experience (translation: we're getting older!), which means we've had a *lot* of practice. The opportunities for us to live out the 4 ACTS OF LOVE have been nearly endless, and as you'll see, our real-life laboratory is pretty much like your everyday life. We're married and have a son named Matt and a daughter-in-law, Shawna (we prefer daughter-in-love, not daughter-in-law). We have lots of extended family. We're blessed with more friends than we can count. We travel a lot, giving us the chance to make new and often unlikely friends (and we'll share some of our travel stories in this book!). We serve in our local church. We lead a company with a culture that practices living out the 4 ACTS OF LOVE every day. And during the past few years we've been hosting a social/faith experiment called Lifetree Café, where the most diverse people on the planet come together for an hour of conversation and stories that feed their souls. We've watched these radical, practical, Jesus-based acts of love change lives again and again and again—including our own.

The 4 ACTS OF LOVE have made our imperfect lives wonderful and full of wonder. And our every step is guided by God's Word. One verse that stands out the most to us is Hebrews 10:24:

“Let us **THINK OF WAYS TO MOTIVATE ONE ANOTHER TO ACTS OF LOVE** and good works.”

—Hebrews 10:24

There's one other thing we want you to know about us (and it almost goes without saying): We're not perfect. Not even close. But our love is grounded in our love for God. That security and assurance of God's love propels us to love others. We take 1 John 4:19 to heart:

“WE LOVE EACH OTHER BECAUSE he
loved us first.” — 1 John 4:19

We believe those words with all our hearts. We also believe what that verse implies—that we simply can't love *without* God.

And we believe this about you: You're special in God's eyes. Nobody is like you and nobody has the unique opportunities you have to change the relationships in your world. We believe you occupy a unique circle of personal connections that are God-orchestrated “for such a time as this.”

The God of the Bible has always worked through people—imperfect, average people. It's not during that one hour every Sunday when you're sitting in a pew and facing forward in silence. Remember: We don't *go* to church. We *are* the church. (A thought that can be simultaneously thrilling and terrifying.) The greatest act of our faith—love—shows up not beneath the glow of stained glass but in the midst of the fluttering fluorescents of our daily lives, when our shadows intersect with those around us. Magnetic faith works in the mundane, everyday interactions we have with people we know. That may seem ordinary to us, but to God it's nothing short of extraordinary.

Speaking of extraordinary, the foundation of this book is based on Jesus—the world's all-time greatest, most influential expert on the topic of love. Real, lasting, uplifting love. He wants us—you and me—to share his love to the people around us. We're Jesus with skin on. His hands and feet and voice and ears.

So we ask you not to merely read this book, but use it as a field guide for your life. Don't study it—try it. Its suggestions for relationships are meant to be experienced and practiced, like piano or sports. Loving others is a skill that doesn't always come easily or naturally. It can sometimes (let's be honest, *usually*) be risky. But we've found it's always a risk worth taking.

Just take one idea at a time if all these suggestions feel overwhelming. Every step moves you forward.

You're not taking these steps alone. We're cheering you on. And, most importantly, God promises to be working inside you and through you.

Why read this book? If Christians are called to love God and love others, then let's do it the most effective way we know how. Together we can make Christians once again known for their practical, authentic, welcoming love, which is nothing short of God's greatest miracle.

1 **WHY NOBODY WANTS TO BE AROUND CHRISTIANS ANYMORE**

Jerry was **THE KIND OF GUY
YOU COULDN'T HELP LIKING**
when you met him.

He was smart, articulate, and nothing short of charming. He always had a story to tell, always had a thoughtful insight, always asked sharp questions that made you wonder. His smiles seemed to linger longer than everyone else's.

Jerry was also a free thinker—someone who vocally and candidly questioned Jesus and Christianity.

A couple years after we'd gotten to know him, Jerry made a statement to us that planted its roots deep into our souls:

"You're not like other Christians."

Those five words were loaded with delightful—and dreadful—implications. We could only smile back, speechless. What exactly do you say to something like that? Was it a good thing? A bad thing? One thing's certain: We're going to spend the rest of our lives unpacking the depth of that declaration.

We met Jerry a few years ago. He was a regular at Lifetree Cafe, one of the "conversation cafés" we host every week for the local community. It's an hour of stories and discussion that focuses on a different topic each week—topics rarely addressed in a church. Every get-together takes place in a comfortable coffee shop-style setting and includes Scripture and prayer.

It's a new kind of faith-centered social experiment we've been conducting in an effort to love people who would never set foot in a church. Anyone is invited, no matter what they believe or don't believe.

Jerry didn't believe.

Yet he kept coming back. He challenged us. He asked lots of questions. He wasn't often satisfied with our answers. But it was a place where he was always welcome and accepted, a place where he knew that the people around him cared about him and what he had to say, even if they disagreed with him. It was, without question, a place of belonging for Jerry. A place where he found true friends. And possibly the only place where he met Christians he didn't dislike.

Jerry seemed mildly open to God, but throughout his life he had dismissed the Christian faith because of the people—other Christians—he'd encountered. While the sparkle in his eye was genuine, the smile on his face belied a man who was uncomfortable around believers.

Even the small things revealed his unease around Christians. One time someone mentioned the Eucharist during one of the group discussions. Jerry leaned over and whispered to me (Thom), "What's that?"

I whispered back, "It's like Communion."

"What's that?" Jerry asked.

At that moment, I knew Jerry had no experience with the church or its basic traditions. Yet the conversation that followed was a rich give-and-take of what Communion is and, more importantly, who Jesus is. I got to share the Gospel with Jerry, centered on his questions and natural curiosity. It was a respectful, beautiful, two-way dialogue I felt God had orchestrated.

Jerry faithfully (no pun intended) attended our conversation café for the last couple years of his life. But would he ever come to believe in God and accept Christ's love? The answer speaks to the very core of this book you're now reading. (We'll share the rest of Jerry's story later.)

"Are **YOU** a Christian?"

It's a question that makes a surprising number of believers uncomfortable in today's world. We sing about being "not ashamed," but many of us can't help but cringe a little when confronted with that simple inquiry. It's not because we're embarrassed to be Christians, but because so many Christians give our beliefs a really bad rap. Like it or not, we're guilty by association.

Recent research makes a pretty clear case that Christians are no longer highly regarded. We're not known for our love for one another—or anyone

else, for that matter. We're known more for what we're *against* than what we're *for*. And it's not the fault of some marginal-but-vocal group of media-hungry extremists. The finger of blame points in one direction: the majority of Christians.

In their book *UnChristian*, authors David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons reveal startling research that shows 87 percent of Americans view Christians as judgmental. And a whopping 85 percent of Americans consider Christians to be hypocritical.¹

Ask yourself: Do I enjoy being around judgmental, hypocritical people? We sure don't.

Christians say they look to the Bible to guide their attitudes and actions, but, unfortunately, most of them are picking the wrong biblical examples. A recent study conducted by The Barna Group (a Christian organization, by the way) revealed that just over half (51 percent) of "self-identified Christians in the U.S." have the same hypocritical and judgmental attitudes and actions portrayed by the Pharisees in the New Testament.² (The Pharisees were those nasty, self-righteous religious leaders with whom Jesus was regularly at odds.) In contrast, Barna found that only 14 percent of self-identified Christians—a mere 1 out of 7—live out the attitudes and actions associated with Jesus.³

Let that sink in for a moment. If you took a checklist of the Pharisees' values versus Jesus' values, more than half of today's Christians would fall squarely in the Pharisee camp. And only 1 in 7 Christians could be described as living according to Jesus' example.

We have a problem.

When we hear that nobody wants to be around Christians anymore, it stings. The sad reality is that we Christ-followers have a lousy reputation. And we have nobody to blame but ourselves. Not the media. Not Hollywood. Not some imagined persecutors of the church. Not all those misguided sinners out there. It's us.

It's Not the Media's Fault

If you think secular media is responsible for the negative view of believers, think again. Only 9 percent of young non-churchgoers ("outsiders"), ages 16 to 29, attribute their unfavorable image of Christians to the secular media. Instead, most point to their personal experiences and conversations with believers themselves. No fewer than 50 million adults (that's one-fifth of all outsiders) blame their negative personal opinions of Christianity on their painful encounters with Christians.⁴

Where **DO YOU** Stand?

Below is an excerpt from The Barna Group's research showing how the researchers determined whether Christians aligned more closely with Jesus or the Pharisees. Take a couple of minutes to honestly consider how you have lived out these attitudes and actions in your life during the past year.

“The 10 research statements used to examine Christ-likeness include the following:

Actions like Jesus:

- I listen to others to learn their story before telling them about my faith.
- In recent years, I have influenced multiple people to consider following Christ.
- I regularly choose to have meals with people with very different faith or morals from me.
- I try to discover the needs of non-Christians rather than waiting for them to come to me.
- I am personally spending time with nonbelievers to help them follow Jesus.

Attitudes like Jesus:

- I see God-given value in every person, regardless of their past or present condition.
- I believe God is for everyone.
- I see God working in people's lives, even when they are not following him.
- It is more important to help people know God is for them than to make sure they know they are sinners.
- I feel compassion for people who are not following God and doing immoral things.

The 10 statements used to assess self-righteousness (like the Pharisees), included the following research items:

Self-Righteous Actions:

- I tell others the most important thing in my life is following God's rules.
- I don't talk about my sins or struggles. That's between me and God.
- I try to avoid spending time with people who are openly gay or lesbian.
- I like to point out those who do not have the right theology or doctrine.
- I prefer to serve people who attend my church rather than those outside the church.

Self-Righteous Attitudes:

- I find it hard to be friends with people who seem to constantly do the wrong things.
- It's not my responsibility to help people who won't help themselves.
- I feel grateful to be a Christian when I see other people's failures and flaws.
- I believe we should stand against those who are opposed to Christian values.
- People who follow God's rules are better than those who do not.⁵

ARE WE BETTER Than "Them"?

You know what it feels like to be rejected. It hurts. Deeply. Condemnation and finger-pointing have never made anyone feel valued or appreciated.

You also know what it feels like to be loved. Maybe it was by your parents or a sibling or your spouse or your partner or your best friend. You've most certainly been loved completely and unconditionally by God. It's quite the opposite from feeling condemned.

The difference is easy to tell...if you ask yourself the right questions:

Do you find yourself disapproving of others from time to time? Have you ever condemned anyone for their behavior or beliefs? Do you value being right about doctrine? Have you rejected people because they can't seem to get past their sin? Have you ever considered yourself better than some people? Do you tend to care more about upholding the truth rather than helping the broken? Do you ever find yourself thinking that you are more deserving of God's love than those people who just keep struggling?

Or... when people talk about you with others, do they say something like, "She's the one who just loves people" or "He's that guy who's always there when people need him"?

What would you rather have people know for certain about you as a Christian? That you're a self-righteous judge? Or that you're a fountain of God's overflowing love?

Sadly, we Christians have gotten the reputation of judging and condemning instead of pointing people to Jesus. We gladly preach John 3:16. You know, the passage that sports enthusiasts plaster on their forehead and street preachers wear as a sandwich board. The verse says, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

Interestingly, we typically fail to add the following verse:

“God sent his Son into the world
NOT TO JUDGE THE WORLD, but
to save the world through him.”

—John 3:17

Let's not perpetuate the myth that once you're a Christian you're somehow immune from flaws and that it's now your job to highlight everyone else's weaknesses and misdeeds. Let's stop pretending that we Christians are "above" the struggling single mom whose kid has a hard time paying attention in Sunday school, or the alcoholic father who's angry at God because his son died in a motorcycle accident, or the teenager who has a million doubts and questions and yet keeps coming back to youth group hoping for more than answers. People all around us are battling through life, and we all need God's love—and his immeasurable grace—in our lives.

There's *one* way God sends his love—his grace—to those people in need. *Through us.* Through Christ's body here on earth.

If Christians aren't spreading God's love, no one will.

“Most of all, **LOVE EACH OTHER AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDED ON IT.** Love makes up for practically anything.”

— 1 Peter 4:8 (*The Message*)

FOUR REASONS

People Don't Want to Be Around Christians

So why is it, really, that people keep their distance from faithful believers? What exactly has tarnished our good standing with the world? We've talked with thousands of people and collected their stories. All of their reasons for avoiding Christians fall into four main categories:

1. “You judge me.” People say they don't feel valued by Christians. They feel criticized. Whether it's their appearance, their mistake-prone past, or an endless list of other differences, they've been told they're not welcome among certain groups of believers. A common reaction we get from Christians who hear this complaint goes something like this: “Well, those people *should* feel judged. They're not living their lives the way God wants them to.” Sigh. These kinds of responses from Christians just serve to prove the point.

And the judgment isn't limited to those outside the church. Our friend Patty serves her church by ministering to the youth. We know Patty, and we know she has a genuine heart for loving teens. But when the leaders of her church saw what she wore and the kind of car she was driving, they weren't sure she was the right person for the job. You read that right. Patty's clothing choice and old beat-up car weren't good enough for the church. So they decided Patty wasn't fit to minister to their kids. (Sadly, we hear stories like this nearly every day.)

Christians have a judgmental reputation.

2. “You don't care about me.” “You don't care what I think or feel. You don't listen. You just lecture me.” All it takes for people to feel this way is to visit a typical church. Virtually nothing about the way people

WHY NOBODY WANTS TO BE AROUND CHRISTIANS ANYMORE

DON'T MERELY READ THIS
BOOK. USE IT AS A FIELD
GUIDE FOR YOUR LIFE.

"They judge me."

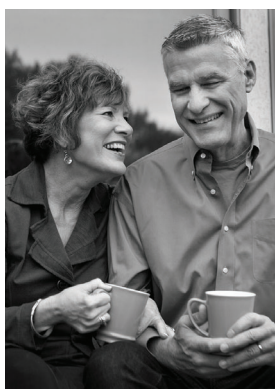
"They're just a bunch of hypocrites."

"If they're an example of who God is, I don't want anything to do with God."

This is what many people are saying about Christians—you may even have friends or co-workers who have said these things to you at some point. **Why do they feel this way?** And is there anything you can do about it? **How can you help give Christians a reputation makeover?** *Why Nobody Wants to Be Around Christians Anymore* gives you more than just answers. Inside you'll find practical helps and real-life examples of what it means to glow your love the way Jesus did. **You'll learn how to avoid pushing people away...and how to be a magnet for God's love instead.**

Authors Thom and Joani Schultz show you how to draw people into a meaningful relationship by practicing four simple yet revolutionary acts of love—Radical Hospitality, Fearless Conversation, Genuine Humility, and Divine Anticipation. **Discover how these Jesus-based principles will transform your life and the people around you.**

Get this book. Read it. Practice it. And watch your faith become truly magnetic.



THOM & JOANI SCHULTZ have spent their entire adult lives serving the church. Thom is the founder and president of Group, a Christian publishing company that has been providing ministry resources for churches since 1974. Joani is Group's chief creative officer. Together they travel the world looking for ways to bring the love of Jesus to everyone. They've also written several best-selling books for church leaders, including *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore*. They recently released *When God Left the Building*, a documentary on the decline of the American church.

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