

A Mile Wide: Trading a Shallow Religion for a Deeper Faith

Introduction & Chapter 1

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, as we enter into this study, open our hearts to a deeper faith in you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

- **Background – Brandon Hatmaker**

- Past cohost of HGTV's *My Big Family Renovation*
- Pastor of Austin church

- **Video** – YouTube: [A Mile Wide \(Why Deepening Your Faith is Critically Important\)](#)

- What is your experience with the 700 Club?
- Reflections on the interview?

- **Opening Discussion**

- Can you give me an example of anyone you know who exhibits truly deep faith?

- **Introduction**

- Read Matthew 13:1-9,18-23
- [xiv] "Instead of focusing on more fruit, we're challenged to focus on the condition of the soil."
 - In what ways is your soil deep? Shallow?

- **Chapter 1**

- In the story of the adulterous woman, with whom do you identify most... teachers, onlookers, woman?
- Has anyone ever been your advocate when you didn't deserve it?
- Can you provide examples of people who dig deep to accuse but skim the surface when looking at themselves?
- [4] When does the "letter of the law" become our god?
- [6] *"Jesus came to rip the scales off our religious eyes to show us the heart behind the letters."*
- [6] Do you have a Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in your spiritual life?
- [8] When responding to an itch for more, do you typically return to the same "table" – adding another similar small group experience, worship service, etc. without going any farther?
- Of the three depths (understanding/relationships/spirit), which do you lack the most?
- [9] Depth in understanding – knowledge for knowledge's sake rather than understanding the person of Jesus
 - In what ways does this resonate with you?
- [12] Jesus didn't want to present the Kingdom as low-hanging fruit. You needed depth to acquire it. The way is narrow because few are willing to do what it takes.
 - How does the church present itself to you as low-hanging fruit? How does it present as a narrow way?
- [14] What are the characteristics of good hearers [i.e., good soil]? *Humility, teachability, repentance*
- Which of the 4 soils best describes where you are now?
 - no understanding
 - no depth... facing trouble & persecution

- thorns / cares of the world
 - fertile
 - [16] “Being moved by a week of good sermons is not the same as being transformed by the gospel.”
 - What does Hatmaker mean?
 - When do fear and worry become so big that they drive out all else – even faith?
 - Other reflections?
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References for material:

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Italics imply important points or example answers the leader can convey

Chapter 2

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord Jesus, draw us closer to you as we seek to know you further. Speak to us in your language of love. In Your name we pray. Amen.

- **Video** – YouTube: [Ryan Stevenson – The Gospel \(Official Lyric Video\)](#)

- Reflections?

- **Opening Discussion**

- [24] What things which were a “big deal” to you in high school no longer are?

- **Scripture** – Read Romans 10:1-13

- **Chapter 2**

- [24] “The gospel continues to grow in my mind.”
 - How is this true for you?
- [26] “I couldn’t quite tell from the trip agenda when we were going to share the good news.”
 - Have you ever been on a church trip/function and wondered the same?
 - What was Hatmaker’s response to the Ethiopian man who asked him about the trip’s purpose?
We’re planting trees
 - In what way did this answer his earlier anxiety about sharing the good news?
- [29] With which of the five first encounters with Christ do you most closely relate?
- [30] “The way we first encountered Jesus will most naturally seem like the purest form of the gospel. It’s the lens through which we will likely view the gospel most clearly.”
 - Think about how you first encountered Jesus. Is this the lens through which you view the gospel?
- [31] Jesus’ *modus operandi* was to meet people where they were.
 - What are examples of you or your church meeting people where they are...at their greatest point of need?
 - Limited gospel = gospel that attempts to lure others to reposition themselves toward us
 - Why is this limited?
 - How is it ineffective?
- [33] What does it mean to you when Hatmaker says “The Gospel is plural.”
- [34] What does it mean to you to be “saved”?
- [36] Is it critical for believers to move beyond their doubt into confidence?
- Do or did you ever think that once you were saved, the major work was done?
- [37] “God doesn’t want us to live for him begrudgingly. He wants to change what we desire”
 - How have your desires changed since coming to know Jesus?
- [41] “We can’t out-dream God.”
 - What God-dreams for you have you realized which you never would have dreamed on your own?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 3

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, we frequently struggle with our identity as your Christian children. Give us the insight and direction to claim our identity with you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- What one word or phrase do you think God would use in describing who you are?

- **Video** – YouTube: [*Your Identity in Christ*](#)

- **Scripture** – Have different members read Genesis 1:27; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Jeremiah 1:5; Jeremiah 29:11; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Corinthians 12:27; 1 John 3:1; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 2:10; John 15:15; Galatians 3:27-29; John 15:5; Romans 8:14

- **Chapter 3**

- [46] Have you ever had a point in your life when you were doing the same thing as Hatmaker... “trying to be and eventually pretending to be something better, more spiritual, more Christian than I really was”?
- [47] Have you ever felt like you were battling over your identity?
- Have you ever equated spiritual health with attendance at church programs?
- [48] “we are never more the real us than when we are closest to Christ.”
 - Do you agree? Why or why not?
- [49] What have been the biggest fears in your life?
 - Has fear led to shame in these cases?
- [50] “Scripture never points us to *more works* as a means to earn God's approval. Ever.”
 - How do you reconcile this with James 2:24 – “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”
- [52] “this is what God sees when he looks at us: Forgiven. Clean. Righteous. Worthy.”
 - In what way do you feel this to be true?
- [53] Positions in Christ – In what ways have you experienced these positions?...
 - We died with Christ
 - We are hidden in Christ (“covered and concealed with the blood of Christ” – hiding our ugliest details)
 - We live in Christ
 - “one of Satan's greatest strategies is to cause believers to live in doubt.”
 - Do you agree?
 - We are raised with Christ and glorified in Christ
 - “put to death... whatever belongs to your earthly nature.”
 - How do we do that?
- [60] How do you define “intimacy with Christ”? Is this different for everyone?
- What has been the most difficult thing for you in finding your identity fully in Christ?
 - What would Jesus say about this thing?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 4

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you for placing us among your people. Lead us to foster a community of disciples who freely share your love. In Your name we pray. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- At what point in your life did you realize you were a disciple of Christ?

- **Scripture** – Read Romans 12:1-2

- **Chapter 4**

- [64] “I’ll spend 90 percent of my time working on strengths and completely ignore my weak spots.”
 - What are examples of you working on your strengths instead of your weaknesses in life/faith?
 - What are the weaknesses you should be addressing instead?
 - Why are we wired this way?
- Do you agree that the church has thrived in Bible study and evangelism?
 - Where has your church thrived? Where has it struggled?
- “We’re better at making converts than we are at being and making disciples”
 - Can you give examples of this?
- [69] Alan of Mobile Loaves and Fishes - “What do you think I’m doing here, Brandon?... I’m making disciples... My job is to get as many people out of the pews and onto the streets...because I know it’ll change them.”
 - Who are the Alans in our midst? Do we have enough of them?
 - Have you had similar discipleship experiences?
- [70] Common postures for “fostering discipleship” experiences
 - Assuming God is already at work
 - As learners
 - Viewing others as Christ sees them
 - Looking for the gospel to work
 - Hoping to encounter Christ
 - *NOT*...Hoping to fix something – “transformation is most likely to happen when we don’t have all the answers or even know what we’re doing.” – that is, when we’re out of our comfort zone
 - Which of these postures resonates with you, and why?
- [72] *Discipleship Exchanges* – Paul’s direction to “give ourselves back to God” as an offering, and to “make new your mind” as a shift in thinking
- [74] Salvation → Presentation → Transformation
 - Transformation doesn’t occur until true presentation – a blanket commitment to God
 - Breaks the cycle of choosing God based on the situation
 - What do you think about this?
- [80] 3 Types of Community
 - Faith Community
 - Hatmaker says “the church is more open today to constructive criticism.”
 - How do you find this as true or untrue today?

- Missional Community
- Secular Community

- In which community do you feel most comfortable?
- Which community do you neglect the most?
- What areas of your life remain untouched by your faith?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 5

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, we are creatures who need each other, but don't always feel welcomed or welcoming. Help us to find ways to foster the community of people you would have us be. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- How would you define your most-loved "church community" to a friend?

- **Scripture** – Read Romans 15:7

- **Chapter 5**

- What is the most unlikely place where you've experienced "community"?
- What disenchanted believers have you encountered who are/were like Crump?
- [91 – In response to his experience with Crump] "I've learned to listen in order to gain a fresh perspective into the experiences and pain of people like him... I've learned to love differently"
 - In what ways have you loved differently the Crumps in your life?
- [93] How does the term church *partner* resonate with you instead of *member*?
- Hatmaker claims it's nearly impossible to make Sunday worship welcoming to those not familiar with church culture.
 - Have you seen any progress on this count?
- When do you find it hard to choose showing up for community over just staying at home?
- In what secular and religious community groups are you involved?
 - What are the characteristics of groups that draw you in?
- Have you ever felt like an outsider in a group?
 - What, if anything, did you or the group do to bridge the gap?
- [110] Hatmaker proposes the following ways to deepen communities:
 - Add mission
 - Inject fun
 - Make it interactive
 - Diversify your schedule
 - Celebrate family dynamics
 - Add break-out groups
 - Increase "hang time"
 - Which of the above have you seen work in your groups?
 - What other suggestions might you offer?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 6

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord, let thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, and let us be instruments of its arrival. In Your holy name we pray. Amen.

- **Video** – YouTube: [MercyMe - I Can Only Imagine \(Video\)](#)

- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read Matthew 6:33; John 18:36; Mark 1:15; Matthew 6:9-10; Matthew 25:34; Luke 17:20-21

- **Chapter 6**

- What do you envision when you hear the word “kingdom”?
- How has your interpretation of the Kingdom of God changed over the years? Why has it changed?
- [120] “Jesus spent most of his earthly ministry trying to help the disciples reconcile two worlds: the kingdom they lived in and understood, and the kingdom of God.”
 - How is Jesus still trying to do this to you today?
- [121] “Kingdom of Heaven” is at the beginning and end of The Beatitudes – for the poor in spirit and the persecuted because of righteousness.
 - Why might Jesus have associated those two groups with ownership of the Kingdom?
- [123] “Our idea of kingdom requires spiritual tasks; Jesus’ kingdom requires spiritual surrender.”
 - Why is this so hard to accept?
- [127] Things Hatmaker has learned about the Kingdom...
 - The kingdom is more of a moment breaking through than a ladder to be climbed
 - The kingdom is a paradox (small is the new big; things we do for the sake of religion get in the way)
 - The kingdom is for sinners, not the righteous
 - The kingdom is more about letting go than holding on
 - In what ways have you let go in order to break through to the kingdom
 - The kingdom is to be pursued
- [134] The Kingdom comes with a cost. Where in your life have you felt that cost?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 7

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, shine your light on the mission you would have us pursue this day. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- What visions does the word "mission" evoke?
- How would you describe the mission of...
 - Humanity
 - The church
 - You personally

- **Video** – YouTube: [Matthew West – Do Something](#)

- **Scripture** – Read Matthew 5:13-16; Matthew 25:31-40

- How would you paraphrase the latter scripture?
- Do you interpret it as a mortal warning?

- **Chapter 7**

- [137] "Every time I put another name and story to a face that I might normally just drive past, something changes in me."
 - Examples of this in your experience?
 - *"the goal can never be just the event or program we're holding to fill that need. The goal must be the people we meet along the way."*
- [138] "That doesn't mean we have to lead everyone we meet to faith in Christ, but it does mean that we recognize and capture every moment as a *gospel moment*."
 - How do you interpret the phrase "gospel moment"?
- [139] "Jesus coming to earth was a supernatural mission trip of sorts."
 - In what ways was Jesus' earthly adventure similar to our church's mission trips?
- [140] We strive for "some type of deep significance and purpose in life."
 - In what ways have you felt or found this?
- [142] Ten ideas to help you become more available
 - Which of these ten are you already demonstrating?
 - Which of these ten do you need to work on?
- [145] "structure of their current church keeps them from living on mission"
 - How does our church structure get in the way?
- [146] Three categories into which you subdivide anything we do because of faith: Communion, Community, Commission
 - Do these three make sense? Is there anything else? *Commitment*?
 - Where does your church spend most of its time?
- [147] ~2/3 of Americans would never attend church
 - Why?
- [148] Start with Community and Commission, with the hopes of moving people toward Communion
 - Does this make sense?
- [151] Discussion Questions from the book

- Regardless of your view of mission, how well have you been living it out?
 - In this chapter we learned that “true mission recognizes that where we are is where we’ve been sent.” Where do you see your greatest potential for mission?
 - What are some important characteristics of a missional person? Which do you struggle with the most? Which are your strengths?
 - Other reflections?
-

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Chapter 8

- **Opening Prayer**

Dear God, help us to understand you meaning of “justice” and encourage us to be its champion in your Kingdom on earth today. In Your Son’s name we pray. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- What visions does the word “justice” evoke?
- What are your expectations of a “justice”?

- **Video** – YouTube: [Justice • This Is the Bible's Radical View](#)

- Reflections?
- “Restorative” justice (vs. “retributive”)
- Obligation to stand up for others
 - Whom do you feel needs this the most in our current society?
- What can we do?

- **Scripture** – Read Psalm 7

- In what ways is justice being served today? In what ways is it not?
- Read Micah 6:8; Luke 6:20-22; 27-36
- Greek word *dikaioisune* translated as “righteousness” instead of “justice”
 - More in line with restorative justice than retributive justice

- **Chapter 7**

- [154] “Instead, God’s justice brings healing. It’s laced with a love for mercy. It sees broken things and restores them to wholeness.”
 - More in line with restorative justice
- “Loving mercy and walking humbly are inextricably linked with seeking justice.”
 - How successful are we at loving mercy and walking humbly when seeking justice?
 - Examples?
- Seven Steps to Seeking Justice
 1. View the Journey as Discipleship
 - [157] “The first step in seeking justice is to somehow stop thinking of those we are serving as the project and start thinking of ourselves as the project.”
 - How does this ring true for you?
 - “Most people I’ve met who are working full time in nonprofit work have been doing so either for fewer than five years or more than twenty.”
 - Why?
 2. Settle Your Gospel Theology
 - “holistic gospel” – realizing God’s redemptive plan on earth now, rather than later in heaven
 3. Learn to Love Mercy
 - “...our human bent to prefer physical offerings and sacrifices (or the modern-day checklist) as what we have to do to make God not mad at us.”
 - What are our modern-day physical offerings and sacrifices?
 - Need to understand and love the idea of God’s mercy
 - How are you at this?

- What is the difference between loving mercy and extending mercy? Why is it so important to start with loving mercy?
- 4. Gain a Biblical Definition of Justice
 - *Tsedeq – righteousness / justice*
 - [163] “Biblical justice is really about righteous restoration.”
 - *This is a key point in this chapter*
- 5. Learn to Identify Need
 - [165] “The truth is that need is all around us. We’ve just conditioned ourselves not to see it.”
 - Why do we avoid identifying need around us?
 - What are some ways we can begin to identify need in our community?
- 6. Encounter the Need
 - [166] “we always ask, ‘If you had ten to fifteen people serving you in any capacity, what would it be?’”
- 7. Engage the Need in Community
 - Integration with non-faith based groups
 - “Extend dignity” – “If, in how you are serving, you are extending dignity to the person you are serving, you are doing it right.”
 - Have you ever witnessed service in a way that you feel it may have stripped recipients of their dignity?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 9

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, as our study comes to a close, help us to discover how you would have us deepen our faith, and how to put that deepened faith into action in service for You. In Christ's holy name we pray. Amen.

- **Chapter 9**

- [174] Hatmaker recalls a Texas flooding, and the volunteer organization only letting Christians serve
 - What's your reaction to this?
 - Hatmaker's aversion to matching t-shirts
 - What's the point he's driving home here?
 - Have you seen this type of server/served segregation first-hand?
- [176] Horace Walpole "This world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel."
 - What did he mean?
- 1st Perspective - Faith Environments – "When it comes to interpreting how we apply Scripture, nothing influences us more than the faith or church environment in which we were raised."
 - Agree/disagree?
 - How much does God Himself factor into this equation?
- [177] Be full of both grace and truth, rather than balancing them
 - Did your rearing faith environment lean more toward one or the other?
 - Truth – scripture/study/obedience
 - Grace – freedom/grace
 - Which comes most naturally to you now?
- [179] 2nd Perspective - Friends and Family – "We are all drawn in one way or another to the idea of tribe."
 - Two negative aspects of "belonging" – 1) fear of rejection & 2) hope for acceptance
 - What do you feel are the negative aspects of striving to be in the tribe?
 - Positive aspects?
 - In what ways has the desire for belonging ever influenced your believing? Did this end up having a positive or negative effect on your faith?
 - *Early adopters are like pioneers heading west – the crowds will come later once they see things as a bit safer*
 - [181] "The key is to deeply consider...whether our stance...is truly informed and prayerful or simply a reaction to what we've experienced."
 - Look at 4 bulleted questions and consider them for LGBTQ; abortion; capital punishment
 - [195] We discussed how our early faith, friends, and family influence our spiritual perspective. Which one would you say has shaped your belief perspectives the most?
 - [195] In what ways have your perspectives changed over the years? Why? How have your perspectives stayed the same or even strengthened? Why?
- 3rd Perspective – God's perspective
 - OT – fear of God
 - NT – God's love through Christ
 - Jesus' perspective on love
 - *The Outcast (e.g., the leper)*
 - *The Outsider (e.g., Roman officer)*
 - *The Insider (Peter's mother)*

- [196] In this chapter we discussed the outcast, the outsider, and the insider. Which do you identify with the most? Which do you struggle to identify with the most? Why?
- Other reflections?

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