

[MJTM 14 (2012–2013)]

BOOK REVIEW

Mark Buchanan. *Your Church Is Too Safe: Why Following Christ Turns the World Upside-Down*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 240 pp. Hbk. ISBN: 9780310331230.

A few years ago I had the privilege of meeting Mark Buchanan and his wife Cheryl at a denominational retreat. Mark had been invited to be the keynote speaker. During the course of the retreat, a couple of us from our church staff had the chance to sit down with Mark and talk about the “ups and downs” of ministry as pastors.

He most likely won't remember meeting me. What I remember about that encounter was his passion for the local church, his desire to see lives transformed for Jesus, his longing to see a church that made a difference in its community, and the struggles that he had experienced along the way. He was just like us! His latest book, *Your Church Is Too Safe*, brings what I experienced in brief and in person to the printed page in much greater detail.

From the outset, Buchanan challenges us with these words, “There's an enormous gap between the life Jesus offered and the life we're living.” [AQ: page no.] He spends the rest of the book humbly provoking, prompting, and passionately inviting us to join him in the quest to live life as Jesus has offered it in our lives and in our churches.

In each chapter we are presented with an aspect of life in North America in which Buchanan suggests we as the church can do better living for Christ with our neighbors and the world around us. We also learn how he has attempted to improve in these areas himself.

It comes through loud and clear that Buchanan is passionate about God's word and its application in our world today. He not

only challenges us with words and stories from Scripture, but also weaves in his own experiences—both the successes and failures—from life and pastoral ministry as he tries to apply God’s word and live more like Jesus.

Buchanan openly wrestles with the contrast between how we live life today and how Jesus lived, and also considers how the early church tried to live like Jesus. He joins us in the challenge to consider that, as believers in the twenty-first century, we may find a gap between “what I say I believe and what actually shapes my life.”

Buchanan draws on his own experiences of influencing his community for Christ by being “salt and light” there, by going to the broken and hurting, by engaging the downtrodden and the unlovable, and by following the Spirit’s leading in the unexpected conversations and contacts in life. He has seen God move in ways that deepen his walk with God, inspire his desire to grow, and motivate him to “wreck the roof” of his church—that is, **[explanation]**—and live life as Jesus intended.**[AQ: The phrase “wreck the roof” could be rather puzzling to readers. Could you explain it?]**

Buchanan openly challenges our comfortable views, all the way from our ideas on welcoming the community into our churches, our definition of hospitality, and the way we approach evangelism to how we cast vision in our churches. He states: “I have a modest but subversive proposal. I suggest your church put a moratorium on vision-casting for the foreseeable future. Instead, I suggest you recover the vision that has already been fulfilled, that you are God’s people, chosen and dearly loved. And then rally your church around simply being the church—devote yourselves to teaching, to fellowship, sacraments, worship, and stewardship. Do that, and I promise God will give you more vision than you can chase in a lifetime” (p. ?).**[AQ: Page number needed.]**

As a pastor in the midst of a renewal process with my church I found Buchanan’s words to be stirring and timely. They took me back to my meeting with him a few years ago. I was reminded of his authenticity as a leader; he is not just someone preaching from the “ivory tower,” typing away behind his laptop

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computer. This is a book written from the heart of a pastor who is in the trenches with us as believers, longing to see the church live life the way Jesus intended. He writes with conviction and a passionate “let’s turn the world upside down for Christ” kind of attitude. I recommend the book to every pastor or person in ministry today.

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