

More Than A Hobby

By J. P. Moreland

I have been delighted to be here and I thank all of you for making it a good time for me and my wife and welcoming us and being interested in Christ and then the things of God. I have something that I'm really excited to share with you this evening, and I hope that you'll find it extremely useful in your lives. I want to begin by telling you a story about my family. Before we came here we lived in Lynchburg, Virginia, for a few years. And my daughters, Ashley and Alison, were just little girls at that time. And my wife and I tried to get them involved in gymnastics. We took, especially Ashley to us, some Jean monastics lessons for a few times. And it was just it was too burdensome to go. So we did it a few times and quit. But the girls continued to be interested in gymnastics a little bit when we got here to Southern California. We bought a trampoline and they would go out and do the trampoline now and then.

But it was never anything more than just a hobby. I think they enjoyed it, but it was not something that was anything more than just a part time kind of thing to them. Now, around that time, the women's gymnastics team won the Olympics. And I don't know if you remember Mary Lou Retton and some of those gals that long good while ago won the Olympics. And I'll never forget as long as I live the interviews they did with some of those gals. I don't know if you heard it. It was a little sickening to me, frankly, but it was I was kind of unbelievable. These girls who made it to the Olympics began when they were about in first second grade, spending five hours a

day in the gym. These these little girls in first second grade would get up. They would go to the gym at 6:00 in the morning and they'd put in two hours of workout before they started elementary school for the day.

They'd finish school and then they'd spend three more hours in the gym, come home and do their homework and do the same thing again. And they did that for at least five, sometimes up to seven hours a day in the gym. I can't imagine why a mom or dad would do that to a kid. Unbelievable. When they got in junior high school, they were starting to take trips to 20 or 30 cities around the country for four day competitions.

So they had to pull out of school. They had to have a tutor. They would take tutors with them and they would try to stay up with their classmates, but they never were able to develop normal friendships. This one girl, I don't remember which one she was. She was 17, 18 years old. And the interviewer said, do you do you have a boyfriend or do you date? And she said, well, no, I really had to make a decision that I don't have time for relationships. Maybe when I get older, but I've had to sort of organize my whole life around trying to make it to the Olympics. And I just frankly, I don't have time for guys right now. Now, I want to say this evening that there is a huge difference between using a trampoline as a hobby like my girls did and doing what these young ladies did to prepare for the Olympics.

Jesus Christ does not want to be a hobby for you. And I have come this month and I have I have shared my heart with you. I have shared with you everything I know how to share in a brief period of time. That would be helpful to your lives. Everything I've said to you, I believe this month I've seen it work in my own life and I've come to you on the authority of scripture. But if you have Jesus Christ as a part time activity, you will fail as a disciple. It's it's really that simple. And if you do not make Jesus Christ the primary central passion of your whole life, then everything I've said to you this month will eventually not work, because the core of Christianity is that Jesus Christ does not want to be a hobby.

He wants to be the utter, absolute Lord of everything you do in your life. Now, this is only right. I mean, after all, he was here first. Okay. Jesus Christ does not exist to make you happy. God is not here to serve you. Now, fortunately, Jesus Christ wants you to be happy and he wants to serve you. The remarkable thing about God. And if you walk or walk around sometime outside, look up at the sky or look at a hummingbird or just look at the ocean. I mean, folks, do you really think all this stuff just happened out of nothing? There is a supreme being that made the world he and he exist. He's there. And Jesus Christ really did live. He really was his son and rose from the dead. Now, given that God is a little bit bigger than the rest of us, a lot smarter, a lot more attractive, quite a bit holier than we are. Does that seem like a fair thing to say?

And He was here first, after all. The only sensible thing to recognize is that we're here to serve Him. He's not here to serve us. And I want to talk to you tonight about the single, single most important decision I ever made in my life. Next to having Jesus Christ forgive me for my sins. And that was a decision that I made about a year later, my senior year in college, when I decided that I would, for the rest of my life intend to have Jesus Christ be the single most important thing in my life. My Lord. And I made a decision around November of my senior year in college to say to Jesus Christ it was a weekend retreat I'll never forget it. I'd heard some things.

I was at a point in my life I'd been a believer about 12 months. And when I became a Christian, I didn't understand very much about Christianity. I'd never read much of the Bible. I came to believe Jesus Christ had risen from the dead and that I needed to be forgiven and that He could come into my heart and help me. And that's about all I understood. And as I began to grow, it dawned on me. I just may put it to you, frankly, that the world was a lot bigger than I was, and that God was working out a purpose and history, and that I was being invited to play a role in working out that purpose, even if it meant suffering on my part.

Now, this was the 60s, and the 60s was a time of social upheaval and revolution. And I joined I joined the armies of God and signed up. And I recognized that what that meant for me may have been that I would never own a house. I recognized it may have meant that I would never get married in the rest of my life. I knew that what that might have meant and I told the Lord Jesus, I said, look, I want to get married. I was about at that time, 21 years old. I said I'd like someday to

get married. But I got to tell you that if that's not what you want for me, I'm willing I am willing to have that, if you will help me. If you'll just stay close to me. When I married my wife, I said, look, we're probably never gonna have a house. No guarantees on this. We may live in an apartment the rest of our lives. I don't know, but I'm not gonna live for a house. I didn't have to convince her that, she was the same kind of woman, the same kind of person. And and now there's something I've wanted to share with you all week.

I want to tell you the secret to Hope's marriage and my marriage is that both of us love Jesus Christ more than we love each other, and that has made all the difference in the world. Now I want to invite you to turn to Matthew. Chapter 16, Matthew, Chapter 16. I've read this passage to you before. I want to reflect on it with you. And I'm going to ask you this evening to to listen to my words and honestly assess your life. I don't want you to put on fronts for anybody. Don't try to be someone you're not. When you listen to what I have to say and you think about it for yourself, you keep it to yourself. You don't need to tell anybody about it. Your business and God's, nobody else's business. But I want to ask you to be honest and take a sober look at your life in light of some things I'm about to read to you.

Beginning in verse twenty four, Jesus said something that was really pretty harsh, at least on the surface. He says the following. Jesus said to his disciples, If anybody wants to come after me now, you've expressed tonight that you want to come after Jesus because you've sung to him and by your presence here this evening. I assume that the vast majority of you at least think that you

want to come after him. And I believe I believe many of you do. I believe most of you do. Well, He says if anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily. Luke adds the word daily. And follow me when you take up your cross. What that meant in first century Roman culture was to surrender your rights to the rights of Rome when you took up your cross. Essentially what that meant was you are now giving up your rights and you were acknowledging that Rome had the right to tell you what to do and when Jesus says to take up your cross.

Basically, what he means is that every day you acknowledge that God is the one who has the right to run your life and that you do not have rights of your own any longer relative to Him, that you gave those up, you give him up, and instead you deny yourself. Now, when it when it talks about denying yourself, it doesn't mean that you shouldn't take care of yourself. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't nurture yourself. What it means is that if you want to fail, then you just you spend your time being preoccupied with how well you're doing and you're gonna be a failure.

You weren't - your soul was not made to function that way. And you and I all know people who live that way. And I will tell you, the longer people live like that. Live like what? Live primarily preoccupied with themselves, they end up becoming shrivelled little people. They can't function. They can't be fathers and mothers. They can't be normal citizens. They can't be listeners. Now, you don't want that, but you do not become a person of spiritual power by osmosis. It's not like

you wake up one day and it's poured on, poured out on top of you. You have got to want this more than anything else or it's not gonna happen.

And what Jesus says is that if you are going to be his follower every day, you get up and essentially you get in the habit of saying You're in charge of my life today. This is your life. And you the one who is the Lord of my life. And I am not here to claim my rights. I'm here to serve you. Now you tell him I've got a few problems and I need some help. And here's where I got to have help here. That's part of the deal. Because when He becomes your Lord, He takes it upon Himself to take care of you. But you exchange your rights for his and you do it every day. And that's what he means right here. Now, I want you to notice what he promises will happen. And folks, I will tell you, that verse twenty five is T.R.U.E. It's true. It is as real and as true as the podium in front of me.

And it says this. Jesus said whoever wishes to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. He does. He's not talking about going to hell. He's not talking about actually being murdered, although that could happen. When he says if you try to find your life, basically what he means is if you spend all of your life preoccupied with your own happiness. And ladies and gentlemen, your generation is an incredibly narcissistic generation. My generation, I'm sad to say, began the narcissism, narcissism is when a person lives primarily for his own well-being and doesn't really care about anything else. Your generation is incredibly

narcissistic. I'm not suggesting you are. I have been very deeply - and I say this sincerely - impressed with the students of Biola. I am proud to be a part of this family.

But you are living in a generation and you're living at a time when when movies and television presents what it means to be an ideal person. And an ideal person is someone who is self-absorbed and constantly worried about how happy and how well they're doing, how attractive they are. And if you do that, you're gonna grow up to become a shriveled little person that can't care about other people if your life depended on it. And what Jesus says is, if you will practice simply giving yourself up for Him and get involved in other people's lives, I will promise you what will happen is you will develop a huge soul. Your soul will become so big and strong that you will be a blessing to people whenever you're around them, just because they'll sense something about you that's very, very real.

Turn very quickly to John 14. John 14. If you make the decision to really let Jesus Christ be the boss, the Lord, the dominant force in your life. He has promised and Matthew 16, that you will gain your life in the process. If you really want to gain your life and find out who you are, if you want to find out why you were put here and make sense out of your life. Far more important than finding a good job is to be sure that Christ is your Lord. But in the end, John, 14, he offers another benefit of this. And in verse twenty one of John 14, Jesus says something that I love so much. He says he who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he

who loves me will be loved by my father. And I will love him. And I will make myself real to him.

Folks. As a guy that's fifty-one and halfway through the third quarter probably. My wife and I are down the road farther than most of you in here, I can say that this verse is true as well. And we can say it from experience that there have been innumerable times when Jesus Christ has come to both of us, when we've been in need. When we've sought guidance. When we've been on our knees. When we've been talking to people and didn't know what to say. We have experienced over and over again a presence working alongside of us that's not either one of us, but but someone else.

The Lord Jesus and the Lord Jesus makes himself real to those who are who are intent on following him and obeying him. Now, this is the only way to lay off folks. There's not another game in town close to this. And you think this is hard? This may sound hard to you. And I'm gonna warn you about something in a minute. There is a hardness to it. But let me tell you what. If you want to know what hard is, you try being a self-centered person living for yourself. If you want to see what hard is, people say the teachings of Jesus are hard. The teachings of Jesus are easy compared to the other route, I'll tell you that right now.

Now, what does it mean to make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life? I want to clarify some things here so that so that you don't hear me saying the wrong thing. First of all, it does not mean that you aren't going to have other desires. It does not mean if you make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, that you will not have desires for other things. When I made when I got on my knees that one one evening and said, Lord Jesus, I have known You now for about a year, and I have not understood that You wanted to be the absolute Lord of my life. And tonight I am making a decision that from now on You will be the one that calls the shots of my life. I surrender my will to Your kingdom.

Now automatically that did not mean that my habits and the things I wanted, I needed, all of a sudden act like I didn't want them you understand what I mean. By the way, it didn't mean that many of the things I wanted were wrong. So you don't want to think that if you make Christ the absolute Lord of your life, all of a sudden you've got to change all of your other desires and you've got to start shooting yourself? Well, I shouldn't want this and I shouldn't want that. Christ will take care of that. That'll come in time. You worry about following Him and He'll take care of you. What does Psalm 37, say? Trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and cultivate what? Faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Why? Partly is because He starts shaping what those desires are in your relationship with Him.

So if you allow Christ to be the Lord of your life, it does not mean all of a sudden you've got to somehow rewire all your insides. Secondly, it does not mean you've got to go into full time

Christian work. You know what? There is no such thing as full time Christian work. There are full-time Christians and hobby Christians. And if you're a hobby Christian, it doesn't really matter what you do for a living. You could be in youth work. You could be in the ministry. But if Christ is really deep in your heart, not just a hobby, then it really doesn't matter. How you earn your paycheck doesn't make a difference. If Christ is your Lord, I could care less what you do for a living. There will be there will be a blessedness about your life.

I remember years ago we went to a smorgasbord in San Bernardino and we were eating lunch at this place and there was a busboy in that in that restaurant. And he was just bussing tables and walking around. And I kept looking at him and finally I said that guy that guy loves Jesus Christ. I tell you, you can feel it all over the cotton pickin restaurant. And Hope and I both knew the guy's a believer. So I walked over to him and I said, say, I said, you're Christian. And man, he said, You bet I am. He said, Jesus Christ is my dear friend and I love Him.

And he was a bus boy for Jesus. You know, he wasn't a bus boy that happened to be a Christian. He was a Christian who happened to be a bus boy. I'm not, honestly - [audience cheer] Thank you, dear friend. I'm not a philosopher who happens to be a Christian. I'm a Christian who happens to be a philosopher. I'm not married to Hope and happened to be a Christian. I'm a Christian who happens to be married to Hope. You see what I mean? Jesus even said if you love spouse or children or mother and father more than you love me, you're not worthy of Me. Do you think that's because He doesn't want you to love your wife and children, your mom or dad,

whatever? Of course not. He knows that the richest way that you will be able to love other people is if you love Him first, because that's the way we were made.

Now listen carefully. If you make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life it also does not mean that you're gonna be always going to Bible studies and 24 hours a day Bible study and you always gotta show up at Wednesday night's service. This has very little to do with what your activities are in that sense. If Christ is the Lord of your life, you should be fellowshipping with believers and worshipping on a regular basis. That's true. But apart from that, this is not legalism. It is not that if you say "I really want You to be the complete Lord of my life", all of a sudden now you've got to start going to three religious meetings a week instead of one. That is not what this is about.

What is this about? This is about acknowledging that Christ has the final say in everything you do. This is being a Christian first before anything else. This is saying to the world, I am a follower of Jesus Christ, period. And that is who I am. Now, I happened to do this for a living and I happen to live in Southern California that I loved to, you know, surf or snowboard or whatever your thing thing is. And I do A, B and C, but I'm a Christian first. This is having the center of your passion be more than wanting to get married, more than wanting to have a good job. Wanting to know Jesus Christ and to spread His word and bring honor to His name until they are throwing dirt in your face. That's what it means. And it means saying to Him, I will pursue excellence in my work because I know You.

We need Christian businessmen and women, Christian psychologists, Christian school teachers, whatever your major is. We need Christians to go and do that and be excellent because they're Christians, to rise above their peers because they bear the name of Jesus. We need a generation of Christians to say, I am going to be excellent because I am an ambassador of the greatest kingdom in the world. I have had the chance to share Christ with people from Hollywood. That means absolutely nothing to me. It is no big - I'll never forget.

I was at a conference in Philadelphia, I was on campus crusade staff. I'd been a Christian about three years. And I had told the Lord that if He ever wanted to give me a chance to share with somebody that the world considered to be important, I'd be glad to take the opportunity if He give me a chance. And I was at a hotel in Philadelphia, and I got on the elevator and there was a fellow named Joey Bishop who used to do the Johnny Carson show. He was a comedian with Carson and with Frank Sinatra and a group of those guys in that generation. And Joey Bishop gets on this elevator with this big bodyguard and this girl. I was with them. And that they're just the four of us on the elevator and we're going up. I'm getting off on the third floor. So I said to the Lord, I said, look, you know, I said, Lord, I'd love to have a chance to share you with this guy, but I don't know how to bring up the subject. So I'm available.

Well, I get off the elevator and they get off the elevator. And right across from the elevator, there was a camp. We were having a campus crusade conference there and there was a campus crusade for Christ bookstore sign. So this gal says, Hey, Joey, look at this campus crusade for Christ, I wonder what that is. Well, I whipped around and I said, pardon me, Mr. Bishop, but I couldn't help but overhear your friend's comment, I happen to be an employee with Campus Crusade for Christ. And I would love to tell you very briefly what it is. I gave him and said a little booklet called The Four Spiritual Laws. That really is really a condensation of the teachings of Jesus. If you have a second, I'd like to show it to you.

He turned pale. He got grabbed the booklet and said, OK, kid I'll look at your booklet, man? He was off down the hall. And here's the point. Listen carefully. It was not my privilege to talk to Joey Bishop. It was his privilege to talk to me. And the reason is because my kingdom is a lot bigger than his now. Now, you understand we wear this with a sense of humility. I'm not talking about arrogance here. Far from it. I am talking about the fact that you were not an accident when you were born. You were put here for a purpose. You're not an accident. Now you may think you're an accident. I feel like I am sometimes. But you were put here for a purpose. Why were you put here? What is your job? What is your role in life? What are you to do? Jesus Christ wants you to enlist in His army to make a difference for Him.

He wants to be the unconditional Lord of your life and focus on talking to each one of you. I'm not talking to people with speaking gifts only. We have this sick view that the really important

people are folks who can get up in front of a crowd and talk. And that's just crazy. We are all equally important in the cause of Christ. And you have a spiritual gift of some kind. When you came to Christ and were saved, you were given a spiritual gift, at least one. You have talents and strengths.

You know what else you've got? You've got a history of suffering. You've got problems that you've worked through. You say to me, well, I've got other problems I'm not doing too well with. Fair enough. But there's not a person in this room who hasn't worked through some problems in your life that can be used to share with other people that are working through the same thing and you know what I'm talking about. You have something rich to give other people. Right now on this campus, because of your giftedness, your talents, your own history, and what Jesus Christ wants to do is He wants you to make a difference before you die.

I have prayed hundreds of times. No kidding. That when I die, I want the devil to be glad I'm out of here. And I'm serious. I want him to be glad I'm gone. I want there to be a sense of relief in his kingdom. I mean, I really mean it. And I want you to feel the same way about your life. Now, I want to turn to one more passage and then I want to share with you just one more thing about about my own life. And then I'd like to elect a close and prayer.

Matthew chapter 28. You've heard of the great commission. I know you have, many times. This is the ending of all four gospels and the same passages at the beginning of the Book of Acts that tells us that the gospel writers are emphasizing something. And in verse 18 of Matthew, 28, the Gospel of Matthew closes with the following: Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying All authority has been given to Bill Clinton? No, to Harvard and the Ivy League? To the three major networks? Come on. Who are these people? Come on. They're all dead. They have no authority that has been given to them. All authority has been given to the commander of our army. Period. "All authority has been given to me and heaven on earth. Now you go, therefore, and you make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything I have taught you. And remember this I am with you always, even to the end of the world".

Folks. When I became a Christian, as I said, it was a part of the radical sixties. And as I've said to you before, there was social upheaval and unrest on the college campus. And there was an underground Jesus movement that had begun. And when I became a Christian, as I said earlier, it was not entirely clear to me what that meant, except I knew I needed to be forgiven and I wanted Christ's forgiveness and His help. And so I invited Him to be my savior as best I understood what that meant. As I began to grow and read the scriptures and fellowship with Christians, it became clear to me that there was a struggle going on for the minds and the hearts of people in this country and its around the world as well. I'm just focusing right now on the place that I was familiar with, that there was a war that was raging for people's souls.

I'll never forget there was a girl named Carol Kilner that I'd taken to to a dance and I saw her about two weeks later. We were juniors. I saw her on campus and she was marching against the Vietnam War. And I came up and I said, Carol, what in the world are you doing? And she said, well, I'm marching against the war. And I said, do you know - what are the issues? Do you understand the issues for and against the war? She said, no, I don't know what's going on. I just want to give myself to something bigger than I am.

People hunger to live for something bigger than they are. Most people would rather spend themselves for a cause than to enjoy a self absorbed narcissism. And it became clear to me that the only hope that I had given the life that God had given to me was that if I gave everything I could to advancing His kingdom and His name, I had no idea what that would mean for me. I knew that if God did not want me to get married, I needed to be willing.

And I listed some of those things. So I began to seek to follow Him as best I knew how. And I began to grow. And I took each step. I got guidance to the next step. Now, folks, I know that if all I shared with you was what I talked about the first four weeks and I hope sometime to come back and do this again, that I hope it's been helpful. In fact, not only I hope I have prayed fervently for you that God would take something that I've shared in this word and touch you and help you and genuinely strengthen.

I believe that many of you've been encouraged. I hope so. But that it would be it would come short if I were not honest with you to say that the information I've given you here this month is not simply so you can be happy and get your life fixed, as important as that is, and as much as I want that for you. But this information I've shared with you is private is also so you can become more healthy to give yourself unashamedly an unqualifiedly to Christ as the Lord of your life.

Now, when I did that, and by the way, it I believe it has to happen at a point in time. I believe that there comes a time in everybody's life when they've got to make a decision as to what they whether they want to be all the way in or they still want to have Christianity as a hobby. And you can't force that decision. But there has to come a time when a person says, I'm in, I'm a lifer, I'm in for good and I'm in all the way now.

I said that as a young man my senior year in college. And as I said, I didn't have a clue what it meant for me long haul, which proves that you can say that to the Lord Jesus without having any serious understanding of the path that you will have to take now. From that point on, I needed to keep making little decisions. I needed to continue to make decisions that were consistent with that. So it's not like you make a decision of this sort and you don't have to continue to choose to do things. But I will say that there does come a time when a person faces a turning point in his or

her life. And that turning point is forever altered when you make a decision to make Christ as the Lord of your life. Have you done that? Don't, don't, don't answer.

I'm asking you to assess your own life. If you have done it, then I would say, first of all, I would try to go back to your room tonight and say to the Lord Jesus. This is when I did it. I remember it. I want to thank you for that. And I need your help and strength to follow through and to find out what you have for me to do. If you have never done that, I would like to ask you to think seriously about doing it.

What would hold you up? What possible alternative is there that is more exciting than this? And if you decide to make Christ the Lord of your life tonight or sometime very soon, if you haven't done that, I want to say to you, we need you. Your generation has incredible power. You can change the world. Brothers and sisters, that is not an ideal. That's not a slogan. The only reason I teach is because I think I think I'm mobilizing little warriors for the cause of Christ. And if I didn't think I was mobilizing a little warriors - and some of you are a lot bigger than I am - and little warriors for the cause of Christ - I wouldn't be here. I'd be doing something else. You have incredible talent and power. Give your life to something that matters. Don't spend your college career worrying about how much you're dating. For God's sake, don't spend your time worrying about whether you're attractive or whether you're gonna get a job when you get out of college.

That's playing with tinker toys. I understand that stuff matters at a certain level. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying you should poopoo your needs. But look, [audience laughter] Did I say something wrong? What I am saying is that there is something a lot bigger going on and there is a cause that if you will give yourself to that cause fully, God will meet your needs. And when you die, you will be able to look back. If you have enough time to reflect before your life is taken, you will be able to look back and to say, I believe I was faithful with what God gave me as best I understood.

And ladies and gentlemen, there is nothing I would rather have said about my life than for my wife and my children and my friends who know me personally. You don't know me real well, but the people who really know me say when I pass away: That guy was faithful. He was faithful and he loved Jesus Christ and did everything he could to make his name great. You want that to be true of you? I believe you do. I invite you then, without any reservation, to make Christ the Lord of your life, to tell Him from now on, he has the right to tell you what to do. That by itself won't solve all your problems, because then you need to start taking steps in that way. But don't ever forget the Christian life does not exist primarily so you can be happy. It exists primarily so you can be an ambassador for the greatest person who ever lived. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, there are many things that we can think that are exciting. I suppose being a pro athlete would be exciting, perhaps being a multimillionaire would be exciting, maybe making movies. There are a lot of things that are exciting. And Lord, we are thankful for all of them. We do not speak evil or poorly of people who who have exciting vocations and jobs and who make a lot of money. There is nothing wrong with that. But, Lord Jesus, we want. I want to say tonight that these things are simply boring compared to the greatest thing in the world, and that is being an ambassador for your kingdom. I can't think of anything that is more exhilarating than serving you. And as you know, dear, dear Savior, I've had the privilege of serving you now for 30 years. And I hope you'll give me a few more.

And I do hope that you will speak to the hearts of my dear, dear brothers and sisters here this evening, and that you will remove any fears they might have of making You the Lord of their lives. And if they take that step, would you please instruct and guide them as to how they can unfold their lives consistent with that commitment? Thank you for this month. It's been a privilege, dear Father for me to be here and I thank you for [inaudible]. Thank you for Biota University and for the opportunity we've had to worship and to study together in Jesus name. Amen. God bless you.

[End of Recording].