Being Like Jesus

Guest: Scott Sauls
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Bob: There’s a lot of dialogue today about whether the gospel ought to be thought of as a social gospel. To what extent does it speak to social as opposed to personal issues? Scott Sauls says there are social implications of a transformed life.

Scott: If God has done for us what we believe that He has done—if the One who, though He was rich, became poor so that through His poverty we might become rich—you know, for us to say, “Well, we don’t have any responsibility toward people who are hurting and struggling,”—that’s a disconnect. There is a social byproduct to the gospel if, by social, we mean the way that you treat other people, especially people who are different than you and/or who are less advantaged.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, June 26th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. If your family is a gospel-centered family, what does that mean for how you love and serve others?—especially, the less fortunate in your community. We’ll spend time exploring that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We’re talking this week about how we—as individuals, how we as couples, as families, as a community of faith—how we can do a better job of helping our friends and neighbors see the real Jesus in us, because here’s the premise we’re dealing with. We’re saying people are drawn to the real Jesus; people are not drawn to hypocrites and Pharisees. So the more we’re hypocritical, or judgmental, or pharisaical, we’re not a good representation/a good ambassador for Jesus. But the more we’re like the real Jesus, people are going to say: “There’s something different. I want to know more.” At least, some people are going to say that; right?

Dave: Yes; the only people that weren’t drawn to Jesus were the hypocrites and Pharisees—you know, the most religious people—but the people that were far from God were so irresistibly drawn to the character, and the heart/the love, the others-centeredness of Jesus. If we, as followers of Christ—and there are many Christians that do that/many churches that do that—but often, that’s not what people see; so they’re not drawn to it.

Ann: I love the idea of the church looking like Jesus, because that is irresistible to me; and that’s the title of the book.
Bob: The book we’re talking about—it’s called *Irresistible Faith*. It’s by Scott Sauls, who is joining us again on *FamilyLife Today*—welcome.

Scott: Thank you.

Bob: Scott is a pastor in Nashville—pastors Christ Presbyterian Church. He is an author and a speaker. This new book is all about how we can do a better job of putting Jesus on display in our lives, in our marriages, in our communities.

One of the things we talk about here, often, Scott, is the fact that one of the great apologetics for the Christian faith in 21st-century American culture is going to be a oneness marriage relationship; because so many people have lost any hope that marriage has any value, or that it can be sustainable, or that it can be good for flourishing. When Christians can come together and say, “We have a wonderful marriage,” more and more people are going: “So how does that work? How does that happen?” which is at the heart of what we’re trying to do, here, at FamilyLife®.

You see that in the culture, where you live in Nashville; right?

Scott: I do. My wife and I were having a conversation with a woman in our church, going through a challenging marriage herself. Toward the end of the conversation, I think I had to walk out of the room or something. My wife said: “Hey, babe, I’m going to have to head out. I’ll see you at home.” It was just something very simple and like everyday language.

I came back to my office, where we had the meeting; and the woman was leaving. She said, “How long have you been married?” I said, “About 23 years.” She said: “Your wife just called you ‘babe.’ How did you guys get that?” I take for granted sort of the feeling that that’s just normal. It’s actually *not* people’s ordinary, normal experience.

I do think, because Christ is the inventor of marriage—He’s the bridegroom of the bride; He’s the one who put Adam and Eve in the garden; He’s the one who’s going to invite us down, as a beautiful bride, dressed for her husband, as the new heaven and the new earth at the end of time—whatever that’s going to look like—

Bob: —a wedding feast.

Scott: —a wedding feast. He knows what He’s talking about, even though He lived His whole life as a single man, interestingly. It seems that we, as His followers, have the resources to show the world that there is hope in this often-broken, wounded relationship called marriage.

Bob: As we’ve talked this week, the way we show there is hope is, first of all, by learning to abide—learning to draw our life from Christ, learning to be formed into His
image by time in the Word/time with other Christians—the spiritual practices and
disciplines that have been life-giving and soul-forming for people for centuries. Then,
being a part of a community—where there are real relationships, where there’s
authenticity, where there’s transparency, where we can get real with one another, and
we can speak the truth in love and do the kind of soul surgery that we talked about this
week.

At that point, we’re ready—and it’s not like we have to get perfect in order to debut who
we are—because our life’s on display all the time. But when those things are true about
us, now, there are some things we can be doing that will—well, you say, in the book,
these are the things that will cause the watching world to go, “Tell me more.” What kinds
of things are those?

**Scott:** The things that I hone in on, in the last three chapters of the book especially,
are giving special attention to the poor or to those whom Jesus called “the least of these”;
and then, the second is the integration of faith and work; and then, the third is,
essentially, being public with our faith—you know: “You’re the salt of the earth,” “You’re
the light of the world,” “You’re the city on a hill,” teaching that Jesus gave us in the
Sermon on the Mount. I mean, where do you want to start?

**Bob:** Well, you start with caring for the poor.

**Scott:** Yes.

**Bob:** There are some people, who are going: “Oh, here’s Scott going social gospel on
us”—right?—“that to be Christians, we’re supposed to care for the needs of the poor.
Jesus said the poor will be with us always; it sounded like He was saying, you know,
‘You’re going to have poor people around; don’t mess with them.’”

**Scott:** Yes; He did say the first part; He never said the second part. [Laughter]

**Ann:** I was going to say, “Oh, is that a paraphrase?”

**Scott:** He said, “You’re going to have them;” and, definitely: “Do move toward them”;
but I don’t think He said, “…mess with them;” but He didn’t say, “Don’t mess with them,”
either. He said, “Move toward them.”

There are two commandments that summarize the whole Bible, and the whole duty, and
calling of a human being in Christ: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul,
strength and mind; and the second command is just like it,”—Jesus says, “Love your
neighbor as yourself.”

**Bob:** As soon as Jesus says that, the next thing—somebody says, “Who’s my
neighbor?” He [Jesus] tells about a guy—who is a social outcast, who is in deep need
because he’s been robbed, he’s poor—he’s helpless; right?
Scott: That’s right. And He, interestingly, puts a Samaritan/a despised Samaritan to His audience in the story as the hero and as the rescuer. Of course, we know that, in the Samaritan, we see Jesus.

The repudiation or rejection of terms like “social gospel”—the gospel—look, I know that there are bad forms of it. There’s the presentation of Christianity of: “Love God, and you don’t have to love your neighbor because that’s Jesus’s job,” and then there’s the flipside and the other side: “Love your neighbor, and you don’t have to love God. As long as you’re loving your neighbor, you’re a good person.”

Both are incomplete. Both have something good about them; right? It’s good to have your nose in the Bible every day; it’s good, on the other side, to love your neighbor. It’s not good to just do one, especially as one who identifies as a Christian.

Dave: I love what you’re talking about. I don’t know if you saw this—recently, in the New York Times—what’s his name?—Arthur Brooks came up with a phrase called “motive attribution asymmetry.” You know what that is?

Listen to this—very interesting, because it’s exactly what you were talking about—irresistible faith. He said: “People often say that our problem in America today is intolerance. This is incorrect.” He defines this “motive attribution asymmetry” as “The problem today is contempt, which is a brew of anger and disgust; not just contempt for other people’s ideas, but for other people.”

He’s really hitting on something that I think people have even felt from the church—which I don’t think we’re guilty of, but we can be perceived that way—that we’re called to love our neighbor; but our neighbor often feels like we really have a contempt for them, because they’re not living up to the way we want them to. So there’s this division between us—Christians/church people.

Talk about that, because that’s what you’re talking about. When you love people—the poor; you name it—you are creating an irresistible community that people want to be a part of. Right now, they don’t see that; it doesn’t feel like that.

Scott: Well, here’s how Christianity spread like wildfire in Rome the three centuries after the Bible was written. It was summed up by an emperor who was a lot like Adolf Hitler, Julian. The history books know him as Julian the Apostate. He hated Christianity, and he tried to exterminate Christians from Rome in the same way that Hitler tried to exterminate Jews from Germany.

He was frustrated because he started to see that, every time a Christian was put to death, five more people would get converted. He wrote this letter to a friend of his—that’s been preserved in the archives of history through archeology—the letter is,
essentially, a letter saying, “There’s nothing I can do to get rid of the Christians, because they take better care of our poor than we do.”

That impulse to take better care of Rome’s poor than Rome did came from Jesus. You know, whoever would want to say, “Well, Jesus said the poor will always be with you,” Jesus also said to the rich young ruler, “Give away all that you have and give it to the poor, then come follow Me.” Jesus also gave the good Samaritan parable, as you just pointed out.

The Apostle Paul says, you know, “They urged us to be careful to remember the poor, which we were so eager to do.” You know, there is a social byproduct to the gospel if, by social, we mean the way that you treat other people, especially people who are different than you and/or who are less advantaged than you are. There is a social byproduct to the gospel.

If God has done for us what we believe that He has done—if the One who, though He was rich, became poor so that through His poverty we might become rich—and by the way, we’re all poor, no matter what economic situation we’re in. We experience the deepest poverty of alienation from God, so we have nothing! The whole world minus Jesus is nothing, just like Jesus plus nothing else is everything.

Bob: Right.

Scott: That’s all we’re going to leave the world with.

If He would go to the lengths that He went to—it’s a become for us—to become shamed, and publicly scorned, and misrepresented, and slandered, and alienated from His Father, and crying out on the cross the 22nd Psalm, “Why have you forsaken me?” For us to say, “Well, we don’t have any responsibility toward people who are hurting and struggling,”—that’s a disconnect to me.

Yet, at the same time, it’s such an incredible source of joy for those of us who engage Jesus’s call toward the poor. By the way, I think the Christian church is doing this better than anybody else in the world, and always has, ever since Jesus came. That’s where I think the public narrative is not complete. Are there Christians who use that excuse?—yes, but I think they’re probably the minority. Most Christians—at least, that I’ve experienced—are very, very devoted.

Bob: There is some reality to the fact that those who know Christ are motivated to want to be engaged.

Scott: Absolutely.

Ann: Well, let’s go really practical. Let’s say I’m a mom with kids in the suburbs—or a grandmother—and I’m hearing this. I’m agreeing: “Yes; yes. How do I live that out? I’m
tithing to my church—is that enough?—and they’re doing some cool things.” What would you say to them?

Scott: You know, that’s what we tell our people—we say, “Look,”—you know, our church—we’re a church, probably like yours, that is blessed with an extraordinary amount of resources. We’re able to give away 40 percent of what comes in—goes out. A sizeable line share of that goes toward these kind of ministries—just tons of partnerships—our people are engaged. We tell them: “You know, you can look at your church as a mutual fund, where you’re supporting all sorts of things that Jesus calls believers to support. We just ask that you give, and you give generously, because God loves that; and God says that you’ll love when you start doing it, and you will.”

Ann: We were serving in Pontiac, which is close to where we live, where there is a lot of poverty. We’ve tried to help. I think that there’s sometimes a churning in your heart, where the Holy Spirit’s pushing you, and urging you, and pressing you on to even ask God, “God, is there anything else you would have me to do besides giving money?”

I met these women in Pontiac—they had a van. They opened the back of their van; and I happened to go up to them, because we were redoing some houses in Pontiac. I said, “Hey, what are you doing?” They said: “We were praying; and we were saying, ‘God, how can we help the ‘least of these’?’ We felt like, ‘Well, we could make lunches.’ So every Saturday, we come around the city. We find people that are on the streets”—the homeless/whatever—“and we just hand them a bag lunch and tell them that God loves them and ‘Enjoy.’”

Scott: Yes; that’s terrific. I mean, there are all sorts of opportunities that can serve us like that.

I think, too, one thing that I would want to point out, again, is the plural nature of how the New Testament is written. This burden—a lot of, I think, really tender-hearted people feel this overwhelming burden of: “I feel so responsible,” and “I don’t even know where to start/where to begin, and there are so many huge issues in the world. What’s my contribution?”

It’s not about one person; it’s about the global church of God and local embodiments of it rallying together. I’d say: “Start by being a part of a local church that’s concerned about these things,”—that’s 90 percent of it.

Ann: Yes.

Scott: And then, “Figure out what your place is: If you’re a mother of three young kids, your place is probably prayer and support. If you live in the suburbs, chances are 50 percent of the homes on your block have or will experience divorce, and/or death, and/or an estranged child, or something. “…the least of these”—that applies to all kinds of poverty—definitely, material poverty—we need to be involved, some way, with
material poverty—but there’s also a poverty of spirit that happens, especially in affluent communities.

**Bob:** So, if you’re walking down Commerce Street in downtown Nashville or, if you’re driving along and you pull up to a stoplight and there’s a guy there with a sign, did you roll down your window and give five bucks to him?

**Scott:** I’m impressed that you know there’s a Commerce Street in Nashville! [Laughter]

**Bob:** I’ve been on Commerce Street.

**Scott:** Yes; yes.

**Dave:** There’s probably a Cheesecake Factory there, and Bob’s eaten it.

**Bob:** No, no; but there’s a taco place—San Antonio Taco Company.

**Dave:** Oh, yes. [Laughter]

**Scott:** So, I’m going to answer, “Yes and no.” I mean, sometimes, we’ll roll down the window and, sometimes, we won’t.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Scott:** I think that there are really good organizations to partner with—that can vet—that know how to vet the situations and know how to discern well the difference between a legitimate need and one that’s, you know, maybe something other than that.

**Bob:** You’re familiar with a book that’s been very helpful for a lot of people called *When Helping Hurts.*

**Scott:** Brian Fikkert’s a good friend; yes.

**Bob:** And it’s a great book that helps us understand that the impulse for compassion and for caring is a good impulse, but that doesn’t mean that to pull out the wallet and give somebody five bucks is actually helping them. You may actually be crippling them by doing that. We have to be shrewd; we have to be smart in how we do this.

I will tell you—that there was an afternoon, where I was at home—this was a winter afternoon. My son/my youngest son had been—he had ridden his bike around the neighborhood. For whatever reason, he’d gone all the way up toward the K-Mart®. Our K-Mart was about a mile-and-a-half away from our house, so he’d been gone for awhile. He comes back about 4:30 in the afternoon. He says, “Dad, there was a guy up at the K-Mart, and he doesn’t have a place to stay tonight.” He said, “So what do we do?”
Right there, in that moment, I thought: “This isn’t just a hypothetical/a theoretical. This is my”—then—“14- or 15-year-old son, saying, ‘What’s the right thing to do?’” I said, “Well, let’s go see if he’s still there.” We got in the car; we drove back up to K-Mart, because I wasn’t going to ride a bike up there in the cold! [Laughter] We get back up there, and we found the guy. I said, “Have you had anything to eat?” and he said, “No.” I said: “There’s a little hamburger place up there. I’d like to buy you dinner at the hamburger place.”

That was like—I wanted to model for my son: “I’m not just going to give him ten bucks, because I don’t know where the ten bucks is going to go; but I’ll buy him dinner.” We took him up to the hamburger place, and I gave him the money. I said, “Do you have a place to stay tonight?” He said, “I can find a place to stay,” and I said, “Okay.” It was like: “Then, do I say, ‘If you need anything...’”—you know—“‘Or you can stay at our house...’?” I was feeling some of that: “What do I communicate? What do I model to my son that says, ‘This does matter,’?” and yet, then, I’m thinking of all of the American practicalities: “I don’t know this guy. Come to our house and stay?—does that even make sense? What do you do?”

But I knew that the right answer was not just wave it off and tell your 15-year-old son, “Somebody will take care of him,” or “There’s a rescue mission downtown, and they’ll help him out.” We have to model something here.

**Dave:** Yes; we had that guy—comes live with us.

**Bob:** —the guy from K-Mart?

**Dave:** No.

**Ann:** —not the exact guy.

**Dave:** His name was Jim. We were in seminary; he showed up on Easter Sunday.

**Ann:** —with no shoes on.

**Dave:** I’m not a pastor [then]. We’re sitting in the back of the church; he sits down beside us. You look over and you think, “This is a guy that’s homeless—that woke up, said, ‘It’s Easter Sunday; I’m going to church.’” They do the, “Hey, stand up and say, ‘Hi,’ to the person sitting beside you.”

I say, “Hi,” to somebody over here; my wife turns to me and goes, “This guy over here is coming over for lunch.” I’m like: “What?! What are you talking about? Look at that guy!” She goes, “He’s coming over for lunch.” He ended up staying with us for about a month.

**Ann:** Yes; I asked him to live with us.
Scott: “And by lunch, I mean lodging.” [Laughter]

Dave: Yes; right!

Ann: You know, we were young; we were 21 and 24.

Dave: We had no kids.

Ann: We didn’t have a lock on the door. I didn’t even think about these things—which, with kids, and now, I would really probably think about that. But he was this great guy; we helped him get on his feet.

Dave: Yes; by the end of the month, he had a job and moved out. It was really a learning experience, to say, “That’s the heart of Christ,”—it really is.

Bob: You know, we’re talking here about putting your light on display/letting your light shine before men. As you said, this is not the only way we do it; but in our world, this is a good way for us, if people in our community know about us—that people who are disenfranchised, people who are poor, people who are outcasts, people who are in need—that we want to help.

Ann: I would encourage parents: “This is something that we need to expose our kids to. They need to see other parts of the world/other parts of community, where people are hurting.”

I think we can live in this bubble, where we have everything we want. I remember—we’ve taken our kids all over the world to see villages in Africa, where children and adults are dying of AIDS. They’ve been all over; and they can see: “Wow; I’m needed. Jesus is needed. We have the resources that can help, through our church.” It’s good to give them vision.

Bob: Well, I think families reading, together, a book like Irresistible Faith—or maybe, moms and dads reading it, and just praying and saying, “Okay; Lord, what does this mean for us?”—a chapter at a time—“How can we better represent You? How can we better be Your ambassadors? How can we live, missionally, as husbands and wives/moms and dads?” It’s a step in the right direction.

Scott, we appreciate you writing the book and appreciate you coming and talking about it with us for a little bit this week.

Scott: Thank you.

Bob: We are making the book available this week to FamilyLife Today listeners, who can help support the ongoing work of FamilyLife Today. This ministry is listener-
supported; that means that you were able to listen today because someone in your community made that possible.

The cost of producing and syndicating this program is not insignificant; and listeners in this area have said, “We want it to be available on this local radio station or on devices.” It’s now available through our FamilyLife Today app—you can stream it, online, from our website. You can train your Alexa device to: “Play FamilyLife Today,”—just go into the Alexa app and do that.

All of that happens because listeners, like you, make it happen. We’re grateful for those of you who have partnered with us in the past. If you can make a donation today, we’d love to say, “Thank you,” by sending the book, Irresistible Faith, by Scott Sauls. You can donate, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call to donate at 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

Now, while we’ve been having this conversation with Scott Sauls, I’ve been watching out of the corner of my as David Robbins, the President of FamilyLife, has been listening to our conversation. David’s here; you were nodding and saying, “Let me at the microphone!” You were excited about all that Scott was saying about living purposefully and missionally in our families.

David: Oh, man! I just want to affirm everything about today’s conversation. It fires me up, because this is the long-term trajectory of what we are all about at FamilyLife. Sometimes, we can have the impression that we’re just about strengthening healthy marriages and families for the sake of healthy marriages and families. While there is a strong element of truth in that—because Jesus uses marriage as the metaphor for His relationship with the church—our marriages and families are not just the end.

It is a means/one of the best means to help fulfil Jesus’s mandate that Scott has highlighted today—that we would let our shine before men. A godly home and a marriage reflecting Jesus can do that in such a powerful way, so our homes can be places that are the hands and feet of Jesus and reflect Jesus to our neighbors and serve them well. You know, at FamilyLife, we really do believe that families are the greatest untapped resource on the planet to help build God’s kingdom and cause societal change. We really do believe that any home, who follows Jesus, can have an extraordinary impact on the homes around them.

We aren’t just a ministry that simply does radio and weekend getaways. We do all of that because we are a movement of people, trusting God, to help change the world one home at a time.

Bob: —moving from—

David: —moving from isolation to impact.
Bob: Okay.

David: We cultivate oneness all the time, but it is so that we can be a part of God’s big story.

Bob: Yes; folks, if you’re not used to hearing David say, “From isolation to impact,” you’ll hear it a few times. Thank you, David.

I want to encourage our listeners to be with us, again, tomorrow when we’re going to talk about how we train our kids to be missional. We’re going to hear from Jen Wilkin, with thoughts on how to raise future evangelists. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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