

Significant Lives — Forward

By Jim Golden

The Book **SIGNIFICANT LIVES** has been years in the writing. It has been renamed about five times and reflects a period of two decades of my Christian life. My friend Bill Kellers who has watched its evolution from adolescence to adulthood, challenged me many times to say what I meant and to reveal what I felt as I lived out those years learning to shed the extra baggage most of Christendom seeks to place on its followers. This is not easily done. I watched my life go through two major transitions during this period. It started when I was twenty three and had an encounter with Jesus Christ that changed my life forever.

I had been an "outlaw" biker and proud of it, boasting many times about the cruel and self-indulgent existence I had adopted. I gained everything in life I thought would bring me happiness but found myself deeply depressed. Sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll were the variety that spiced my life. As the old country song proclaimed, I too wanted to, *live fast, love hard, die young, and leave a beautiful memory.*

God's timing is impeccable. All my old friends are either dead or serving life sentences in prison. Jesus set me free in the nick of time, and that is a very important point. If anyone could boast of knowing about slavery it was me. I had lived a life of slavery that was destined to end tragically. The night I surrendered my life to Jesus and cried out for his help, he set me free from all my addictions, both mental and physical. The next day I had no withdrawal symptoms and had lost all desire for drugs. More than that, he made me feel like I was actually worth something. With Jesus I never had to prove my worth. He always let me know the price that was paid to redeem me was great. For the first time in my life I no longer felt alone.

What took place over the next twenty years is a difficult story to tell. I watched almost bewildered as the joy Christ gave me turned into sorrow. This book seeks to address the subtle yet heinous way men and women, can be ensnared and enslaved by a religious system that is not truly representative of Christ or true Christianity. It is written to you who are searching for, or have known the freedom that Jesus brings and have slowly seen organized religion drain that life and freedom away. This book is written for you who have been misused and abused through all the subtle innuendoes of everyday Christian conformity. You are fed up with Christianity and don't want to go to Church anymore. Or you are still going and if you weren't afraid of what people would say you would run through the doors shedding all the extra baggage as you ran.

Sometimes it is necessary to flee from the tyranny of *religion*. Christianity has become a religion just like all the other religions of the world. It was never meant to be so. It was always intended to be a relationship between each individual person and their Savior. Out of that vital relationship a brotherhood would be formed in the Spirit of his life and love. What stands today is not a monument to Jesus' sacrifice and love, but a demonstration of man's inability to duplicate the salvation of God through his own meager efforts. If you feel like a burnt offering and must flee—do not flee into the wilderness of doubt and despair, but into the loving arms of your only Savior—Jesus Christ.

Organized religion puts so much emphasis on appearances, but Jesus told Nicodemus that the Kingdom was invisible to all but those who were part of it. Religion's job is not to try and make a better Church, as if the work of Christ were somehow lacking, but to

to try and make a better Church, as if the work of Christ were somehow lacking, but to espouse Christ's followers to Christ. Because of its failure to do so, the word religion, as it is used in this volume, doesn't carry the favorable definition it does in most of society. Instead, it represents the lifeless structure created through man's feeble attempt to play God. Few of us ever come to know what it really means to trust Jesus with our lives. If we did we would not constantly be trying to change each other.

This book is about a man who failed to heed the warning of scripture and is still feeling the effects. The man is me, and I entrusted much of my life to men rather than Jesus alone. I was a slave set free by the sacrifice of Christ and then imprisoned by the vain philosophies of men. My desire for recognition coupled with the "carrot" of doing something great for God led me on like a donkey. What can we do for God that he hasn't already done for us? And what greater work of God is there than pure and simple devotion to his Son Jesus Christ? It is our loyalty to Jesus, not misplaced loyalty to men, and their causes that pleases God.

SIGNIFICANT LIVES is written out of the pain that we all experience simply by living in a less-than-perfect world. Its continual challenge is for the reader to allow the truth of God's word to reveal who God is and what we are because of his work of salvation, instead of the circumstances and situations of life—fight the good fight of faith. The Chapters have been kept short deliberately, in order to foster meditation. I know what it is like to come home so tired from work that the last thing you want to do is read another book on your responsibilities as a good Christian. It is my hope that this book will simply reveal all that God has already done and help you to respond to his ability. I do not want to turn you into people of responsibility but people with *respondability*.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.