

"I've always been grateful for Jeff Vanderstelt's heart for discipleship. Rather than drawing people to himself, he labors to help others understand the power they possess in the Spirit. He does what all good leaders should do: spends his days equipping others to do the work of the ministry."

Francis Chan, *New York Times* best-selling author, *Crazy Love* and *Forgotten God*

"*Saturate* is a compelling and biblically serious picture of Jesus and the mission he has given his people. It is a book that is deeply doctrinal and helpfully applicable. I have known Jeff to faithfully live out the philosophies of life and day-to-day ministry contained in these pages, and have watched firsthand as God produced much fruit. I pray it encourages you."

Matt Chandler, Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Dallas, Texas;
President, Acts 29 Church Planting Network

"Jeff is one of the smartest, most dedicated, and most interesting disciplers I know. In this book, and through the medium of his life story, he effectively passes on the key insights that make him one of the best movement leaders in the country. *Saturate* is a winner."

Alan Hirsch, Founder, Forge and Future Travelers; award-winning author, *Untamed*, *Right Here Right Now*, and *ReJesus*

"If someone were to ask me where to go to learn about discipleship, I would hand them the Bible along with Jeff Vanderstelt's book *Saturate*. Readers will find themselves taking a survey of their lives, seeing the areas that God desires to take captive for his glory. Whether you are a preacher, homemaker, small-group leader, high school student, or new convert, *Saturate* will spur you on to live a life that will influence others to know Jesus while growing people in Jesus, not just at church, but in all of life."

Jackie Hill-Perry, poet; writer; hip-hop artist

"This is a thought-provoking, heart-warming account of a body of believers taking God's call to live as family seriously. Don't allow yourself to be distracted by the details or to quibble with the incidentals. This book challenges and encourages all of us to intentionally live on mission in the mundane details and events of everyday life."

Steve Timmis, Executive Director, Acts 29 Church Planting Network

“Jeff Vanderstelt uses an ordinary experience to give us extraordinary insight into what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. *Saturate* is a great challenge to all of us to stop doing church and be the church!”

Dave Ferguson, Lead Pastor, Community Christian Church,
Naperville, Illinois; Lead Visionary, NewThing

“In *Saturate*, Jeff Vanderstelt endeavors to provide Christians with an image of God’s grace that is all-encompassing and inescapable. Whether you are new to the faith or a seasoned believer, Jeff’s words will encourage you and focus God’s gospel on every facet of your life. This book will challenge the way you see your Savior, your mission, and your everyday life.”

Ed Stetzer, President, LifeWay Research; author,
Subversive Kingdom; www.edstetzer.com

“Jeff Vanderstelt’s passion and commitment to the fame of Jesus are as evident in this book as they are in his preaching. It was so refreshing to read chapter after chapter that lifted high the name of Jesus and to be challenged to do the same more and more in my life and ministry.”

Matt Carter, Pastor of Preaching, The Austin Stone Community
Church, Austin, Texas; co-author, *The Real Win*

“*Saturate* is a crucially needed and down-to-earth manual for what is most important—loving God and loving neighbors. What Christian wouldn’t want to know what Jeff Vanderstelt has brilliantly and helpfully given us here?”

Jared C. Wilson, Director of Content Strategy, Midwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary; author, *Gospel Wakefulness* and
The Prodigal Church

SATURATE

SATURATE

Being Disciples of Jesus
in the Everyday Stuff of Life

JEFF VANDERSTELT

Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life

Copyright © 2015 by Jeff Vanderstelt

Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Published in association with Yates & Yates, www.yates2.com

Cover design: Erik Maldre

Interior illustrations: James Graves, Visual Jams

First printing 2015

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked RSV are from *The Revised Standard Version*. Copyright ©1946, 1952, 1971, 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-4599-3

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-4602-0

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-4600-6

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-4601-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Vanderstelt, Jeff, 1969–
Saturate : being disciples of Jesus in the everyday stuff of life / Jeff Vanderstelt.

pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4335-4599-3 (hc)

1. Christian life. I. Title.
BV4501.3.V365 2015
248.4—dc23 2014036805

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

LB 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To

The Soma Tacoma family.
Thank you for ten great years!
“You are our glory and joy”
(1 Thess. 2:20).

Mom and Dad.
God used you to plant the seeds.
Saturate is part of your legacy.

Jayne, Haylee, Caleb, and Maggie.
You are my greatest gifts.
You all bring me great joy!

Nicki.
This book is written in your memory.
Distant neighbor who became sister, mother, grandmother,
and friend,
you are finally with the man of your dreams!

Contents

Acknowledgments	11
-----------------------	----

Introduction	13
--------------------	----

Part 1: **Beginnings**

1 It Began in a Boat	19
----------------------------	----

2 Jesus Goes to Poker Parties	29
-------------------------------------	----

Part 2: **Jesus**

3 Jesus Is Better	49
-------------------------	----

4 Jesus <i>Did</i> It Better: We <i>Have Been</i> Saved	57
---	----

5 Jesus <i>Does</i> It Better: We <i>Are Being</i> Saved	65
--	----

6 Jesus <i>Will Make</i> It Better: We <i>Will Be</i> Saved	73
---	----

Part 3: **Discipleship**

7 All-of-Life Discipleship	83
----------------------------------	----

8 Life on Life	93
----------------------	----

9 Life in Community	103
---------------------------	-----

10 Life on Mission	111
--------------------------	-----

Part 4: New Identity

11 You Do Who You Are 123

12 We Are Family: Baptized into the Name of 133
the Father

13 We Are Servants: Baptized into the Name of 143
the Son (the King)

14 We Are Missionaries: Baptized into the Name of 153
the Holy Spirit

Part 5: The Everyday Stuff

15 Everyday Rhythms 169

16 An Everyday Plan 193

17 Everyday People on Mission 213

Conclusion 229

Appendix A: Missional Community Covenant Template . . . 235

Appendix B: Missional Community Covenant Sample 241

General Index 247

Scripture Index 253

Acknowledgments

This book exists because of the prodding of many people. I certainly prefer speaking over writing, but the elders from Soma Tacoma, along with several leaders from churches that belong to the Soma family, urged me to write. They were relentless. I owe them a great deal of gratitude, both for pushing me forward and for giving me the space to dedicate time to this work.

I also am indebted to the Soma Tacoma family. We have struggled together, failed forward, and grown in grace, and we have more stories of God's faithfulness to tell than there are pages in this book. I am so thankful to God for each man, woman, and child who has been part of the body of Christ on mission together in Tacoma these past ten years. This book represents our learning together. It has been a joy to grow with these dear brothers and sisters.

I am also grateful to my assistant, Sara Parker, who served me so well. Without her help, this book would not have been completed. Randy and Lisa Sheets' encouragement kept me from throwing in the towel; they constantly reassured me that what is written on these pages will serve people well. And the Wedge missional community, every iteration of it for the past ten years, has its fingerprints all over this book. Life together has been beautifully redemptive.

Lastly, Jayne, my truth-telling, Jesus-loving, Spirit-filled, praying wife, has kept me grounded, keeps it real, and prods us

all to keep looking heavenward with faith-drenched, hope-filled expectancy that our Father has great plans in store for us all. God knew I needed a partner and friend like Jayne. Not only would I not have written a book, I wouldn't have the ministry I have without her.

Introduction

I don't like to write.

In fact, I have avoided writing a book for more than six years. But I couldn't hold back any longer, because my heart has been captured by a vision that I cannot shake.

This vision is Jesus saturation—every man, woman, and child in every place having a daily encounter with Jesus through words spoken and deeds done through his people.

This isn't really my vision. It is God's vision. He says, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14). And God will accomplish this vision through his Son, Jesus Christ, working through his body, the church. Ephesians 1:22–23 says, "He put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

Jesus is the head of his body, the church, through which he intends to fill every place with his presence. This is saturation—Jesus saturation.

Can you imagine every city, every neighborhood, every street, and every house saturated with Jesus's presence through his people? What if, in every school, every classroom, and every extracurricular activity, students daily experienced the person and work of Jesus? Can you dream with me of a day when no business office, retail center, or industrial hub can get away

from the good news of Jesus proclaimed in words and expressed in gracious deeds? A day when every café, pub, restaurant, or bakery smells of the aroma of Christ?

This is God's intention for his world. And his plan is to do it through his people.

He wants you to be a part of it!

I hope you are reading this book because you want to be part of this. If you know, trust, love, and follow Jesus, you are part of it. If you haven't yet submitted your life to Jesus, I pray you will. Jesus saturation can't happen *through* you until it's happened *to* you.

As you read these pages, you, like others, may think this book and its message are for the spiritual elite: a special group of Christians who are uniquely called of God, the paid staff members of a church, or the professionally trained. Don't believe that lie. It isn't true.

Or maybe you think the only people through whom God works are the radicals who sell all they have and go into foreign lands. He certainly works through them. But he also works through people who stay. His plan is to work through all of us in every place.

It's possible that you've never experienced Jesus working through you to fill every place you go with his presence. Don't let that prevent you from believing he wants to and is able to. The truth is, if you belong to Jesus, you are called to participate in his vision of saturation.

To be clear, this is not a leadership book, though I hope leaders will read it and benefit from it. Rather, this book is written to encourage the everyday Jesus follower to engage in the everyday stuff of life with the goal of seeing Jesus saturation for everyone in every place.

This book is for you—the normal, unimpressive, everyday person, young or old, male or female—because Jesus means

to carry out his mission of filling the world with his presence through you. You are *meant* to do this.

The mission of Jesus is yours to participate in. It has always been God's intention to choose normal, everyday people, and to show his amazing power and glory through them. He's not looking for the most impressive person because he already is that person.

You are a perfect candidate for God to use to accomplish his purpose!

The people you will read about in this book are perfect candidates too. They are real, everyday, normal, unimpressive people. (Well, *I'm* impressed with them because I know them, love them, and have seen Jesus do remarkable things in and through their lives.) They are no different from you. What is most impressive about them is not they themselves, but Jesus at work in and through them. That is what Jesus saturation is really about—him filling us so he can fill the world through us.

I pray your journey through the following pages will lead you to become a disciple of Jesus on his mission in the everyday stuff of life and will result in exceedingly great joy for you as Jesus works through you to fill the world with his glory for his fame. What greater purpose and joy could there be?

I don't know your starting point on this journey, but let's begin where Jesus woke me up to this vision. It began in a boat.



Part 1

Beginnings



1

It Began in a Boat

The sun was shimmering off the smooth water of Hamlin Lake. The lines on our poles hung quietly undisturbed in the water. We hadn't had a bite for a while.

I enjoyed these moments with my dad. Though I loved catching fish, I was also fine just looking at the water and being with my father. And I needed some time for nothing: no sound, no conversation, no work. Just space.

I had been a youth pastor for twelve years, but was at a crossroad. I had served in three churches and had experienced what many would call success in all of them. However, it was clear to everyone around me that I no longer fit the youth pastor role.

I was the director of Student Impact, the high school ministry at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. I had started off strong there as we restructured the

ministry to better mobilize the students for mission to their campuses. At the beginning, it seemed as if I was the golden boy. People loved me. The team followed my lead. The ministry grew considerably. The leadership above me seemed to believe in me. I had taken on a position that needed a catalytic thinker with a new vision and strategy, and I had delivered. But eventually I had found myself in a management position, with a team that was losing trust in me. I didn't fit any longer. I had gotten into ministry because I loved seeing people's lives changed, and I had gone into youth ministry because teenagers, in their youthful idealism, believe they can be a significant part of changing the world. Now I was largely running an organization and becoming more and more distant from people.

As a result, I had fallen into a deep depression and had started seeing a counselor. I was anxious, afraid, and felt like a failure. Most nights, I tossed and turned till dawn, barely able to sleep. My wife, Jayne, had to regularly wash the bed sheets because they were drenched with my anxious sweat. I pondered the purpose of my life and how I could continue in the work I had in front of me. My heart agonized over what to do next. Some nights, I contemplated suicide. We had a newborn daughter and a newly purchased house, but I was clueless about our future. I knew I needed to get away from it all for a few days.

I needed God to speak.

I needed direction.

I needed help.

And I needed to be with my dad on the lake.

“Clearly Something Is Broken”

For some time, we didn't speak. I like that about fishing—I don't have to talk. I needed that quietness.

Finally, Dad broke the silence: “Did you know we just hired a discipleship pastor at our church? Your mother and I really

like him. He's been training us to be disciples of Jesus who make disciples. We've been in the church for over fifty years now, but we've never been trained to do that. We've been having these neighborhood parties and getting into discussions about Jesus. Your mother and I are learning a lot and really enjoying it."

My dad continued to share that when his church hired its new discipleship pastor, the majority of the members didn't know how to obey Jesus's command to make disciples. Now, they were seeing that it should be normal for everyone to do it.

As he spoke, I thought of all the years I had worked with youth. I'll never forget the first student I led to faith in Jesus—Lynn. As soon as she believed, her adoptive parents kicked her out of the house. The families in our church took her into their homes and treated her as if she was one of them while she struggled forward in her faith. Her life was messy, but in the mess, she brought many others to join our community of faith.

I pictured many afternoons going through Bible stories after school with Pedro, a freshman, and his friends Jessica, Jennifer, and Adam. I laughed thinking about Jessica, who had no Bible knowledge at all, saying Joseph's new name over and over again—"Zaphenath-paneah, Zaphenath-paneah, Zaphenath-paneah"—because it sounded funny to her.

I remembered Todd, whom I walked with from seventh grade through high school. He was a shy kid whose passion came out on the field of sports. He hardly spoke out about Jesus at first, but eventually he grew to disciple boys younger than him. I thought of Nick, who, as a junior, was the life of the party. God grabbed hold of his life, transformed him, and used him to lead dozens of his classmates to Jesus—in the halls, at parties, or at a restaurant after a football game.

One of those classmates was Stephan. He had a very sad story. His mother had left him on the side of the road when he was a little boy. Eventually, he found his way through the foster

system and landed in a boys' home. Stephan came to believe he had a loving Father in God because of Jesus. He went from being a lost orphan to becoming one of God's children.

Name after name, face after face, kept coming to my mind. All of these kids were everyday teenagers whom Jesus had worked in and through to accomplish great stuff.

All of them had become disciple makers.

In other words, all of them could tell the story of God's love for them through Jesus. All were growing in knowing, believing, and obeying the Scriptures. They prayed for people regularly and saw many friends come to follow, obey, and depend on Jesus as well.

Some did it through sports, others in the classroom, and many just by hanging out together and talking about Jesus in normal life. They loved being together and were excited about Jesus, and that excitement spilled out into everyone around them.

As I thought of all these kids and what my dad had just said, I found myself angry and dumbfounded. "How is it possible that someone could be in the church for over fifty years and not know how to make disciples?" I wondered. "What's wrong with the church? I've witnessed teens begin to do this in a matter of months. And why would you hire a discipleship pastor when the whole point of the church is making disciples of Jesus? It's not a separate program of the church! It's the mission of the whole church! Every disciple of Jesus is called to it.

"Clearly something is broken!"

You Are the Church

My dad continued to talk about the training he and my mom were receiving. He spoke about the parties they were throwing, the neighbors who were attending, and the conversations they were having. I was excited for his newfound ministry, but I was

also sad, because as I thought about what it was like growing up in our house, I realized my parents had been doing much of this for years.

My parents were the epitome of hospitality. They arranged their lives and home so that people would want to be there. It didn't seem remarkable to me when I was growing up; it was all I knew. They put a pool in the backyard. My dad remodeled our basement and set up a pool table, Ping Pong table, coin-operated video games, and pinball machines. Our house was the place for teenagers to party because the door was always open and my mom always had the pantry fully stocked with food and drink. It was clear my parents wanted people there. It was completely normal to come home from a night out with my friends to find my parents hanging out with a group of teenagers. I'd walk in and hear them having a conversation about sports, school, dating, sex—you name it.

It seemed a little weird when I thought about it: "Why would teenagers want to hang out with my parents and talk about sex?" I wondered. "What do my parents know about sex?"

It also was not unusual during dinner for my parents to bring up a person who was in need of a place to stay: a boy whose parents had kicked him out of the house; a husband who was not doing well in his marriage and needed a break; or an ex-drug addict who needed shelter from peers who wanted to pull him back into the world of narcotics. There were dozens of these stories over the years. After they would share such a story, my parents would ask us four boys: "Should we invite him to live with us? Would one of you like to give up your room for a while?" I can't say that was always easy for us. What teenage boy wants to give up his bedroom to a stranger? However, there are many men today who call Jesus their Lord and the Vanderstels their family because of the way my mom and dad included them.

“If my parents didn’t know how to make disciples, what were they doing all those years?” I asked myself.

As I stared at the water, it dawned on me that no one had ever validated what my mom and dad did. It didn’t fit into the mold of church programs. The leadership of the church never told them that they were doing the work of the church in their home. Church had been wrongly defined *only* as an event: a Bible study on Wednesday or a class and the worship service on Sunday.

People *went* to church. It was an event or a program. Church wasn’t seen as the people of God doing the work of God in everyday life. What my parents did, didn’t count—or at least that’s what they believed.

That day in the boat was a defining moment in my life. As I look back, I recognize that the Spirit of God was showing me a deficiency in how the church was understood and structured and how discipleship was defined and practiced.

The reason the teenagers I worked with were able to make disciples of Jesus was that they believed they *were* the church. For them, church wasn’t something you *go to*. Church was something *you are*.

This is confusing to some because the word *church* literally means “gathering.” So people naturally think it is something you go to—after all, you go to a gathering.

However, when the Bible uses the word *church*, it is referring to God’s people gathered to Jesus to do his work in the world. The teens were the *Jesus-gathered people* sent to the soccer team, the classroom, and the party on Friday night, to do Jesus’s work of loving others toward him. My parents were no different. Neither were those who surrounded Jesus.

Neither are you.

When you read the accounts of Jesus’s life in the Bible, you see this. You discover the everyday, messed-up people that Jesus

gathered around himself to do his work. You see warriors and women, fishermen and fathers, pagans and prostitutes, the religious and the ragamuffins. And you see Jesus in the middle of all of them, doing the work of God with them in the marketplace, at a party, on a mountainside, in a house—and on a fishing boat on a calm lake where there seemed to be no fish.

He still does his work on quiet fishing boats in the middle of calm waters far away from religious gatherings. He was doing it in me, right there with my dad.

Everyday People Doing Everyday Stuff

It was then that I realized something. The youth I had worked with had experienced something closer to church than my parents' generation had. These kids were the simple, regular, messed-up people that Jesus had chosen to use in everyday life.

My parents weren't alone.

I was one of them as well.

I began to realize that I didn't fit the typical mold of a church leader either. Yes, I could preach on a stage, but I didn't fit the "church-as-event-only" approach anymore. I wanted to see people, all people, all kinds of people in every place, mobilized to be the "Jesus-gathered people" on his mission.

Then I started to think about all the youth I had worked with over the years and considered where they were. It occurred to me that many had come to believe the same thing my parents had. They didn't see themselves as a key part of the church anymore. What they did didn't seem to count. They had graduated into what the kids called "big church." They had gone from actively seeking to reach their peers through the everyday stuff of life to being asked to sit in the bleachers and watch someone else play the game. They had joined the thousands of people who unwittingly believe the lie that church is only an event you

attend and that the mission of God is accomplished on a stage where only a few do the ministry in front of the many.

As a teenager, I played goalie on a hockey team that traveled throughout Michigan. At one point, I had the opportunity to step up into a higher division, a change that could have led to a hockey career. However, our family had friends who had played professional hockey, and hearing from them about the lifestyle on the road toward a hockey career made it unappealing to me. Besides, at that point in my life, I was planning to become a lawyer. So I turned down the opportunity, and with that, I stopped playing hockey altogether. I hung up my skates. In fact, I even stopped watching the game. It was a sad moment—a kind of death moment for me. I died to being a hockey player. I figured, “Why keep playing when there is nowhere to go from here but down?” I didn’t want a regular reminder that I could have done more but chose not to.

This is what had happened to many of the teenagers I had led. Some of them had just taken their seats. They gave, they attended, they invited, and they served from time to time. But they were sitting most of the time. Some of them had become disillusioned with the church. They had been key players in the game. They had experienced the victories, but they had been demoted to being spectators! I think they figured that if all they were ever going to do was just watch after having played the game, then why should they even be around the game at all? Some had left the church altogether, I’m sad to say. Others had found themselves involved in college campus ministries or overseas work—places that still believed everyone should be in the game—while others had gone on to join new expressions of the church that were calling them back into the game of everyday mission. In many cases, the local churches lost some of their best players.

There I was, in a boat with my dad—and with Jesus. My

dad didn't see it, but Jesus had been with him all along—and with me. He had been in all of those acts of love, open doors, and late-evening conversations. Jesus had been in the midst of his church, doing his work through my parents' lives. My mom and dad didn't need to be trained in a new form of discipleship. They needed to know that all those years they had been creating opportunities for disciples of Jesus to be made. They just needed to be equipped in how to engage those opportunities more intentionally with Jesus.

Several times throughout the next couple of days, I shared with my parents how they should see what they had always done as the ministry of the church—they could make disciples of Jesus in their home. A spark was ignited in their hearts and they began to get excited about how God had uniquely designed them for his purposes in the world. What they did mattered! He could use them as they were.

And even though they didn't know it, they had been discipling their own children while they were reaching out to others, so their example had deeply shaped me.

A New Beginning

Months passed after that time on the water, but the thoughts I'd had that day didn't leave me. "Something has to be done about this!" I kept thinking. I believed there was a need to call normal people to see all of life as the context for Jesus's ministry to happen. Everyone could be and should be a part of this. And the everyday stuff of life matters—Jesus wants to see his church engage in all of life for his purposes.

When I finally resigned from my position four months later, I believed I would never serve in a vocational capacity in any church again. The leadership had graciously paid for me to receive a thorough assessment, which revealed that I should be involved in new business start-ups, consulting, or catalytic

leadership. The assessors warned me against ever getting into a management position again and clearly directed me away from church leadership unless it was church planting.

At that point, I really didn't think the church had a place for someone like me. I thought: "Why not fall back on your business degree and start a company? Make disciples of Jesus as a businessman and then teach others to do the same. Maybe you could be an encouragement to businessmen like Dad, who were never told business could be done as ministry." I also wondered: "How can Jayne and I partner together for ministry in and around our home? What if we could retrain people to see that the mission of the church can be done in the home and the marketplace?"

The day I stepped down, I received three phone calls, all from people unaware that I had resigned. Each call was an invitation to be a church planter. One of them was from a former mentor of mine. He invited me back to the greater Seattle area to plant churches with him. As he described what he felt called to do and invited me into it, I sensed a nudge from the Holy Spirit: "This is the beginning of what I started to birth in your heart on the boat. I'm in this. Trust me as I lead you into something new."

Not fully grasping what we were embarking on, Jayne, Haylee (our ten-month-old daughter), and I found ourselves, two months later, in January 2003, driving across the country in our minivan, ready to use our life savings to support us as we began planting churches where everyone is involved in the work and every part of life counts—where people like my mom and dad, single moms, teenage boys, and fisherman have a part to play.



2

Jesus Goes to Poker Parties

“I’ll raise you a hundred,” Greg said as he pushed a stack of poker chips into the middle of the table to show he meant business. At the same time, laughter erupted from the next room, where the ladies were sharing stories about marriage and motherhood. Greg’s wife, Mary, listened as the women poured out their hearts to one another.

This was the first time Greg and Mary had been at our house for one of our parties.¹ Jayne and I had been in the Puget Sound area for about a year, and we were beginning to call people together to *be* the church in the greater Tacoma area. Parties and feasts were one of the means we were using to gather people

¹ This poker game was primarily a recreational activity. I do not promote gambling, as I am very aware that many people have experienced addictive and destructive results.

and give them a taste of what it might look like to be the church in our community.

In the past, several of us in the Chicago suburbs had experienced community forming this way around meals and celebrations. Caesar and Tina had introduced us to the art of hospitality and the joy of the party. Tina is an amazing cook, and she and Caesar hosted the best dinner parties around. If they were hosting a dinner, you did not want to miss it!

At one of these dinners, about three courses into an amazing five-course meal, it dawned on us: “This is a great picture of the kingdom of God!” While immersed in the feast of food and life together, we recalled Jesus comparing the kingdom of God to a feast where everyone is invited in (Luke 14:12–24). Together we started to imagine what the church would be like if we all believed we were a picture of God’s kingdom breaking into the world in ways that felt like a party. One of us said: “If the church believed this, it would radically change what we do and how we live! We would be known as the most celebratory people around. Word would spread. People who wouldn’t normally want to come to a church event would come to our homes. Who wouldn’t want to be a part of that?”

A seed was planted in our hearts at that moment, and the conversation never really ended. We began to ask questions: What if we were to start a church that feasted and celebrated around Jesus together? What if our homes were intended by God to be some of the primary spaces in which the ministry of the church should take place? People could be welcomed in, cared for, and experience belonging to a people who enjoy one another and life together. This would transform people’s perceptions of the church. Their understanding of who the church is and what she does would be very different from others’. As a result, people would come to understand Jesus in an entirely new way. If church were more like a feast and ministry took place

regularly in our homes, everyone could join and anyone could do it. Everyone loves to feast and celebrate together, and anyone who knows and loves Jesus can host a party around him.

Jesus's church celebrates and feasts together. His people live life to the fullest for his glory and learn how to do the normal, everyday stuff of life for his glory. Not just parties and feasts—everything!

This isn't a new idea. God called his people Israel to remember him and show the world what he was like through the everyday stuff, the big and the small. The special feasts, which were extraordinary, were meant to remind them that everyday meals mattered as well. Parties are God's idea. During the Israelites' parties and feasts, they were to remind one another that all of life was to be done as an expression of their love for God. God called them to see their celebrations and feasts as an expression of their worship. He wanted them to use something mundane and everyday—eating—as a reminder that he is to be the center of all the everyday stuff.

God is brilliant, isn't he?

He wants us to see that all of life, every aspect of it, is a good gift from him. He wants our hearts to cry out, "God is so good!" in the middle of everyday life. He wants us to eat, play, create, work, celebrate, rest, and relate to one another for his glory. God always intended that every part of life be a participation in his activity in the world and a celebration of his goodness to us all. So he told Israel to do all the stuff of life—working, resting, eating, and celebrating—in remembrance of him.

I love this about God!

I grew up believing that after I died, I would go to heaven, which would be like an eternal church service. As a teenager, I wasn't too excited about that. All I could imagine was a bunch of us in white gowns floating on clouds that felt like hard

wooden pews. We would forever listen to long sermons and sing songs from red hymnals. Later in life, as I read the Bible, I found out that this is not an accurate picture of our future with Jesus. The Scriptures tell of a day when we will dwell on a new earth and enjoy a sin-free existence, living life fully and abundantly with God in our midst. We will eat, play, create, work, celebrate, and rest in perfect harmony with God and one another. It will all be good and it will all be worship!

Imagine if the church was like this now.

God's Calling to Israel

That was clearly God's desire for Israel. While the whips of Egypt were still fresh in their memories, God reminded his people that he had delivered them from slavery and would be in their midst continually. He commanded them to eat a meal (the Passover) to regularly remind them of how he had rescued them. But he didn't end there. He also commanded them to throw several other kinds of parties that would tell the stories of his love and provision for them. In fact, God not only commanded Israel to party in his name, he also required that the people give a significant portion of their money to make sure the celebration was done well.

Can you imagine churches today taking offerings so they would be known as the people who threw the best parties?

God wanted the nations to know what he was like by looking at Israel's celebrations and feasts. He wanted the other nations to want to belong to Israel because the best of life is lived in God's care and under his leadership. He wanted Israel to be a people who pointed forward to a new world, where life would be lived perfectly together. They were to be a foretaste of the future reality so that all nations would want to join them in it one day.

God didn't want just Israel as his people in the new world.

He wanted all peoples, every tribe and tongue, all the creative expressions of every culture, together worshiping him through every aspect of life.

It didn't happen.

The people of Israel failed. They didn't make God the center of the party.

Their parties and festivals became empty rituals—passionless religious events. God wanted them to love him and others through the everyday stuff. However, they let the everyday stuff of life become mundane. Sure, many of them continued to observe the feasts, but their hearts were not in it. At one point, God told them that he hated their parties and feasts because their hearts were not directed toward him.

Can you imagine how sad a day that must have been? The invitations have been sent. The decorations are hung. The food is prepared. The guests arrive. Then God arrives; after all, the party is for him. But imagine that he tells you he hates the party. He hates it because you have forgotten to celebrate him. He hates it because every aspect of your celebration tells a lie about what he is like. The party doesn't demonstrate his character and desires. And it clearly doesn't show how much he loves people. It is a Godless, loveless party. And he hates it!

That's what God did to Israel. They forgot about him, not just at their feasts and festivals, but in the stuff of everyday life as well. Their celebrations and life together became merely empty rituals. They did not love God and they did not love the people he sent them to bless.

God doesn't just want us to feast or celebrate as his people. He wants us to remember him, keeping him central to the party by showing kindness, love, and mercy to all those who lack a reason to celebrate. We are to be the "good-news people" to the world, who show the good news in our lives and invite others to receive it into theirs. The celebration is to be for God. The

party is to be about God. After all, it is meant to tell the world what he is like.

The Israelites forgot who they were and why they had been called to be God's people. Their feasts became empty, heartless, ritualistic events. They were partying without the life of the party, celebrating without a reason to celebrate. That led to self-absorbed consumption and heartless activities without love.

The same can happen to us if we forget to keep God central. Church becomes an empty, heartless religious event.

Jesus Redeems the Party

So Jesus came as God in the flesh to show us the heart of God for people. Before Jesus did any formal ministry, he spent thirty years of his life doing normal, mundane, unremarkable stuff. He lived a regular life for the glory of God. He ate, played, learned, celebrated, worked with his hands, and rested just like the rest of humanity. Think about this! God moved into the neighborhood, and nobody but a few shepherds took notice. And they did so only because a bunch of angels showed up while they were watching their sheep and told them to go see Jesus.

Jesus lived a normal, quiet life for thirty years in an unknown town. He was so normal that when he began his public ministry, the people from his hometown couldn't believe it. "Isn't this Jesus of Nazareth?" they asked. "Isn't he the carpenter's son who lived among us, doing normal stuff like the rest of us?" (see Matt. 13:53–58). The difference is that Jesus did everything for his heavenly Father's glory. He lived all of his life as an expression of his love for God the Father. Jesus did what Israel didn't do. He did what we don't do. He set apart every aspect of life as holy unto God.

That is what the word *holy* means—"set apart."

God first sets people apart for himself. He makes people

holy. It is his job, not ours. We can't make ourselves holy; only God can do it. He did it with Israel. God set Israel apart as his people and made them holy. However, they failed to set apart life unto God. They became a holy people living unholy lives.

Jesus was set apart for God in the world, and everything he did was to glorify God. He was holy, and every aspect of his life was holy, because he did it unto God. When he ate, he blessed God for good provision. When he worked, he knew he was doing it unto God and showing off the creativity of our Creator. He submitted to authority humbly and gladly as an act of submission to God, who ordains rulers in every place. He served, shared with, and loved others because he knew God is a serving God who gives good gifts and is love himself. Jesus lived every part of his life in submission to God. Every action was an act of love to God and others, and every one of his thoughts was directed by God. Jesus lived a fully God-dependent life. Holy Jesus lived a holy life wholly unto God.

Finally, after thirty years of quiet, submissive, humble worship, Jesus began to publicly proclaim the good news of God's kingdom—that there was a new order to things, and he was going to bring all of life under God's authority. He wanted a holy people who would live all of life wholly unto God. God was making a way for all of life to be restored to the way he always intended it to be. Everything could be made good and all of life could be worship. Life could be as it was always meant to be!

But Jesus didn't just proclaim the good news. He lived a good-news life, showing what God's rule and reign looks like when God breaks into the normal stuff of everyday life.

So Jesus went to a party.

It was a wedding feast in Cana. They had been celebrating and partying for days, so the wine ran out. How embarrassing this was for the bride and groom, as well as their families!

So Jesus's mother came to him for help. Jesus then ordered the servants to fill six jars used for ceremonial cleansing with 120 gallons of water. He then turned the water into wine—and Jesus's wine was better than every drop they had consumed earlier. Jesus entered into the events of everyday life. Then he took the ceremonial stuff of religion, changed it, and made the party better.

This is what Jesus does. Jesus makes life better. Jesus brings the better wine. He takes empty religion and ritual, and brings it to life for everyday people. He takes what many deem holy (like the water in the ceremonial cleansing jars) and brings it to the party. He breaks down the barrier between what people might call sacred and secular. Jesus makes all things sacred—including wine at a party.

Don't miss this.

Jesus is giving us a picture of what God is like. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh to bring the life of God into our wineless (worshipless) party. The holy Word became human flesh. The holy God became holy man. The holy shows up in the mundane when the mundane is set apart for God's work in the world. God became flesh and dwelt among us. Water became wine and satisfied the thirsty at the party.

Jesus did this so that we also could do this.

He came to rescue a people back to God so all of life would be seen as sacred; all of life would be set apart unto God; and everyday stuff would be seen as worship—even a poker party.

A New View of Church

The idea of everyday stuff done for God's purposes in the world had gotten Greg's attention.

"Brett told me you guys are starting a church," he said. "But you don't seem like church people. You're hosting a poker party!"

I thought about what Greg had said while I stared down at my hand, trying to keep my poker face on. Greg had grown up in the church, but he had vowed never to go near one again. All he saw when he looked at the church was an empty, lifeless, loveless institution with structures and events. He rejected the church because he hadn't experienced the love of Christ there.

For Greg, church seemed disconnected from everyday life. He observed people *doing* church, not Jesus *living life* through his church. In his mind, church had become merely a religious event.

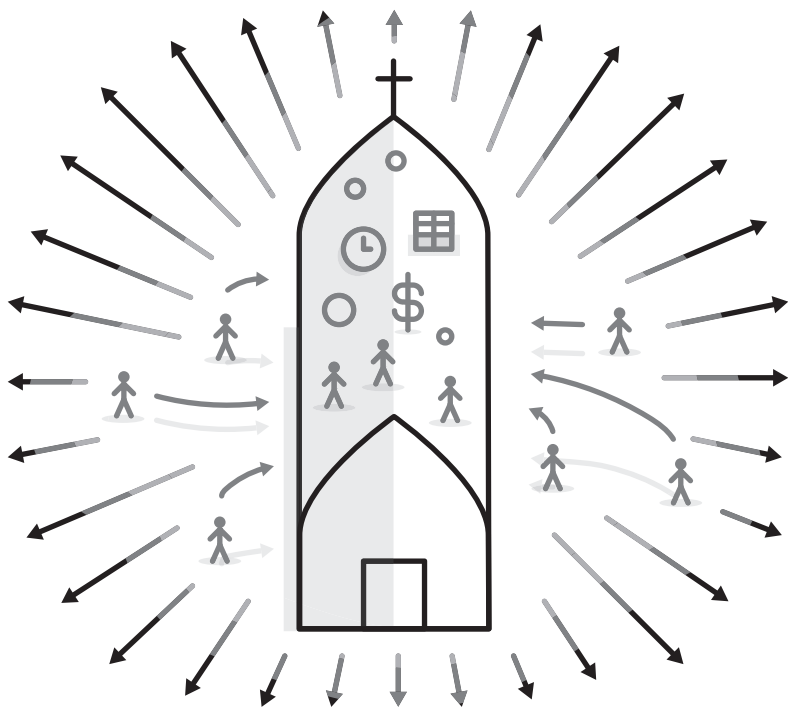
Greg and Mary were also struggling in their marriage without much relational connection to others for help. On top of that, Greg was personally struggling with a lack of purpose in life. At that moment, they felt hopeless and helpless.

Brett had been sharing with him our vision of church as the people of Jesus living intentionally together on mission in the everyday stuff of life. Brett had been inviting Greg to come to our dinners and parties for a while, but Greg had continued to refuse. He held onto his belief that the church was not something he could be a part of. But Brett was changing, and Greg could no longer ignore this. The two of them had grown up together as friends, but something was different. Brett was different. Could there be something to this church that Brett was talking about?

So Greg came to the party.

"Many people have the wrong view of church," I said to Greg. "They see the church only as a building or an event they go to on Sunday. Others see the church as the leaders or pastors who put together programs for its members. That's why, when people say, 'I like or don't like such and such church,' they are actually referring to the way the leaders or pastors lead, teach, or organize the people. They don't usually mean they like or don't like the people."

This wasn't the first time I had explained what the church is. Several times over the previous six months, I had pulled out a napkin at a coffee shop or restaurant, drawn a picture of a church building, and described how most people have this wrong view of church in their minds.



"Some think it's a building you go to," I would say as I drew a picture of a building. "Others think it's the programs and events that happen there [here I would draw circles inside the building, representing activities], while others think it's mainly the leaders who run those events [at this point, I would add some stick figures inside the building]. They think the job

of those leaders is to get people to invite their friends to the building [here I would draw stick figures and arrows pointing toward the building]. They also encourage people to give their time [I would draw a clock], their money [a dollar sign], and their skills and gifts [a gift-wrapped present] to support what happens primarily in the building.”

Next, I would draw arrows going out of the building. “Though we might gather together in a building,” I would say, “the church of Jesus is the *people of God saved through the person and work of Jesus Christ for his purposes in the world*. God’s intent was never to have us define church merely as an event on Sunday. We don’t go to church. We *are* the church sent out into the world.” Then I would draw stick figures, a clock, a dollar sign, and a present beside the arrows coming out of the building.

Then I would say: “Jesus wants us to live all of life fully for his glory in the world—every part and every person. Jesus didn’t live, serve, suffer, and die so we could just attend a Christian event. He lived and died so we could become his people who are sent into every part of the world on his behalf. He wants all people everywhere to see and know about him, and he wants everyone to know that everything is to be done for his glory. We now see our time, our money, and our unique abilities as means to serve both the people who are the church and those in our cities who don’t know the great news of God’s love for them in Jesus Christ. All of life counts and everyone matters.

“You have a teaching gift? You may use that to teach people who gather as the church weekly. However, what if you also used that ability to serve in the public schools as a teacher? Maybe you’re a gifted administrator. Think about how many places in our city need strong administration! Or maybe you’re great at building businesses. What if we started businesses that

existed to bring good to people and cities as a way of showing what God is like and that he really cares about commerce as well?”

I would continue to demonstrate how every person and every gift could be used to show others what our God is like in the world. I would also describe how the majority of our time and resources should not be poured only into our gatherings of Christians. We are blessed to be a blessing to our world with all God has given us. He wants to pour us out as an act of his love to the world.

People have a hard time seeing the church this way, because they see life in terms of the sacred and the secular; they think of things as Christian or non-Christian. They believe some things or events are good and godly, and others are not. They define *things* or *events* as Christian or secular—such as Christian music or secular music, Christian fellowship or secular parties. They see a church gathering on Sunday as sacred or Christian, but not the rest of life. That’s why they dress differently, talk differently, and often act altogether differently at “church” on Sunday than they do during the rest of the week. And those who are not yet a part of the church or have left it want nothing to do with it because it doesn’t seem to have anything to do with the rest of life.

However, the Scriptures don’t define church or Christians this way. Neither do they define life this way. It’s not activities and events that are primarily Christian. It’s people. Activities and events, by themselves, are not sacred, but people are.

As we saw earlier, the word *holy* in the Bible means to be set apart for God’s purposes in the world. God’s desire was never to have a people who are separated from the world, creating some kind of Christian cul-de-sac. He wants every part of life to reflect his greatness. He wants his people doing all of life for

his glory everywhere, so that the world becomes surrounded by the life of God that is in the world through his people.

What makes an event or activity sacred is not calling it “Christian” or inviting only Christians to it. Something is holy unto God when God’s set-apart people do what they do for his glory: eating, drinking, playing, celebrating, working, resting, creating—you name it, God wants us to do all that we do for his glory (1 Cor. 10:31). For example, there is no such thing as truly “Christian” music. Music isn’t Christian, people are. However, when Christians, who are set apart for God’s work in the world, make music for God’s glory, it is sacred.

Jesus at the Center

Over the poker table, I continued to share a vision for church that was very different from what Greg had heard before.

“The role of Jesus’s church—his set-apart people—is to increasingly bring all of life under his leadership so that he is the center of everything,” I said. “We are Jesus’s people (the church), who go to work with him and for him. We are Jesus’s people, who eat with him and for him. And we are Jesus’s people, who can party and should party with Jesus and for Jesus. He wants to fill the city of Tacoma with his presence through his people in everything and in every place. He is here with us right now because he loves to be present among his people at the party. We are Jesus’s church living for his purposes right now.”

I went on to describe how, as Jesus’s church in Tacoma, we planned to lead people to Jesus and then train them in how to live all of life for him. Right there in the middle of the game, we all started to dream about what a church that embraced all of life lived for Jesus’s fame might look like. For instance, we started to dream out loud about how business could be done for the good of our city and the fame of Jesus. “What if we ran businesses that served our city and made a lot of money to serve

those in need at the same time? We could show our city that our God is generous and compassionate.” We brainstormed for a while on that theme and many others.

I think I was beaten pretty badly at poker that night, because I got so caught up in the vision of normal people like Greg, Brett, and others being the church in the everyday stuff of life. As I reflect on that time, I am amazed at the creativity and passion released in these men as they dreamed about their role in seeing all of life done with Jesus and for Jesus in our city.

That same creativity is in you and your friends as well. If you have God’s Spirit, you have the One who created the universe in you. Have you ever taken time to dream about what God might want to do in and through you where you live and work?

We did.

Our core group started seeing everyday life as the place where God wants to work through his church. We threw parties, ate together, and joined in with the activities of our city. We taught Christians to see themselves as the church in our city, instead of seeing church as only an event they attend on Sunday. They learned how to see all of life as sacred and every action as part of God’s missionary work in the world. They began to see that he was in them, working through them in the normal stuff of life. They began to go to work as people on Jesus’s mission, hung out at the park on mission, and celebrated in homes, pubs, and coffee shops together on mission. We served neighbors, schools, and various social-service organizations. We cleaned city parks and walked the city streets while praying. We ate together often and celebrated God’s grace in our lives.

In all of this, we sought to experience and show what God is like in the everyday stuff of life. As a result, more people were drawn to Jesus and his community, and more people engaged in everyday life for God’s glory.

I have found that one of the main reasons many people do

not get involved with the work of God in this world is because they don't believe God wants to or can use them. They don't know that Jesus prefers normal, weak, and broken people.

Like my dad, many wrongly believe that God's work is mainly done in a church building by a few paid professionals, and that the members of the church are primarily needed to volunteer to run the programs and provide the financial support. Normal stuff doesn't count, because God doesn't work in the normal stuff, they believe. They can't imagine themselves on his mission in the world, because they have wrongly believed God's mission isn't in the world. Church seems so disconnected from the rest of their lives. Clearly, God can't use them, and therefore he must not want them.

But this is simply not true. God loves to use normal people in the everyday stuff of life. He wants everyone involved in all of life.

All In

That night over a game of cards, Greg's heart was captured by the thought of being called to Jesus in all of life. He could actually see how following Jesus would change how he lived his life. Jesus was pursuing Greg at the party. He wanted to work in and through Greg to bring change to our city. Greg began to believe there was a place for him in this. Jesus wanted his life, his skills, his passions, and his daily activities. Greg didn't need to become a pastor, teach Sunday school, go to Bible school, or run a church program to be a significant part of Jesus's work in the world. Greg needed to come to Jesus, place his faith in what Jesus had done for him, and surrender his life to Jesus. Then Jesus would work through Greg wherever he went, to show the world what Jesus is like and tell them who he is and what he had done in Greg's life.

"I'm all in!" Greg said, as the poker chips tumbled forward into the center of the table.

Something had happened in Greg and Mary that night around poker, feasting, drinking, and talking together. On the way home, they said to each other, "We've got to be with those people again!" They could see God wanted them. Jesus was building his church, and it was looking different than they expected. Maybe there was a place in it for them as well.

There's a place for you too. Jesus wants to work in and through your life, all of your life, including the everyday stuff.

God brought Greg and Mary back to himself through Jesus working through his body, the church, at a party. He also brought healing and health to their marriage, and eventually God called Greg to take leadership of an organization called Network Ministries—a transitional ministry that helps move homeless families into homes where they are trained for life. Greg and Mary came to Jesus through the normal stuff of life, and now they train others how to live all of life submitted to Jesus.

As we struggled to find a name for this people—the church Jesus was building us to be in Tacoma—we finally landed on Soma, a Greek word that means "body." In Ephesians 1:23, the apostle Paul calls the church Jesus's body (his *sōma*), through which he fills all in all. Paul's vision, given to him by the Holy Spirit, was of the church being the body of Christ, through which Jesus fills every place with his presence through his people.

All God's people, everywhere, filling everyday life with his presence.

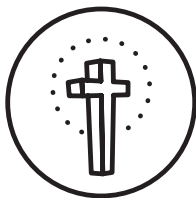
This is the vision that captured our hearts as well. We are Soma—Jesus's body, through which he intends to fill every place with his presence so that every person might have a daily encounter with him in every way. Jesus saturation—Jesus filling

every place with his presence through normal, everyday people in the everyday stuff of life. This has always been God's vision for his people.

Please consider joining us and many others around the world as God fills every place in every way with his presence.

But make sure you start with Jesus.

We can't do this without him.



Part 2

Jesus

"*Saturate* is a compelling and biblically serious picture of Jesus and the mission he has given his people. It is a book that is deeply doctrinal and helpfully applicable."

MATT CHANDLER, *Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Dallas, Texas; President, Acts 29 Church Planting Network*

"Jeff is one of the smartest, most dedicated, and most interesting disciple-makers I know. In this book, he effectively passes on the key insights that make him one of the best movement leaders in the country. *Saturate* is a winner."

ALAN HIRSCH, *Founder, Forge and Future Travelers; award-winning author, Untamed, Right Here Right Now, and ReJesus*

"I've always been grateful for Jeff Vanderstelt's heart for discipleship. He does what all good leaders should do: spends his days equipping others to do the work of the ministry."

FRANCIS CHAN, *New York Times best-selling author, Crazy Love and Forgotten God*

"If someone were to ask me where to go to learn about discipleship, I would hand them the Bible along with Jeff Vanderstelt's book *Saturate*."

JACKIE HILL-PERRY, *poet; writer; hip-hop artist*

"*Saturate* is a crucially needed and down-to-earth manual for what is most important—loving God and loving neighbors."

JARED C. WILSON, *Director of Content Strategy, Midwestern Seminary; author, Gospel Wakefulness and The Prodigal Church*

"Vanderstelt's passion and commitment to the fame of Jesus are as evident in this book as they are in his preaching."

MATT CARTER, *Pastor of Preaching, The Austin Stone Community Church, Austin, Texas; co-author, The Real Win*

CHRISTIAN MINISTRY / CHURCH LIFE

 **CROSSWAY**
www.crossway.org

