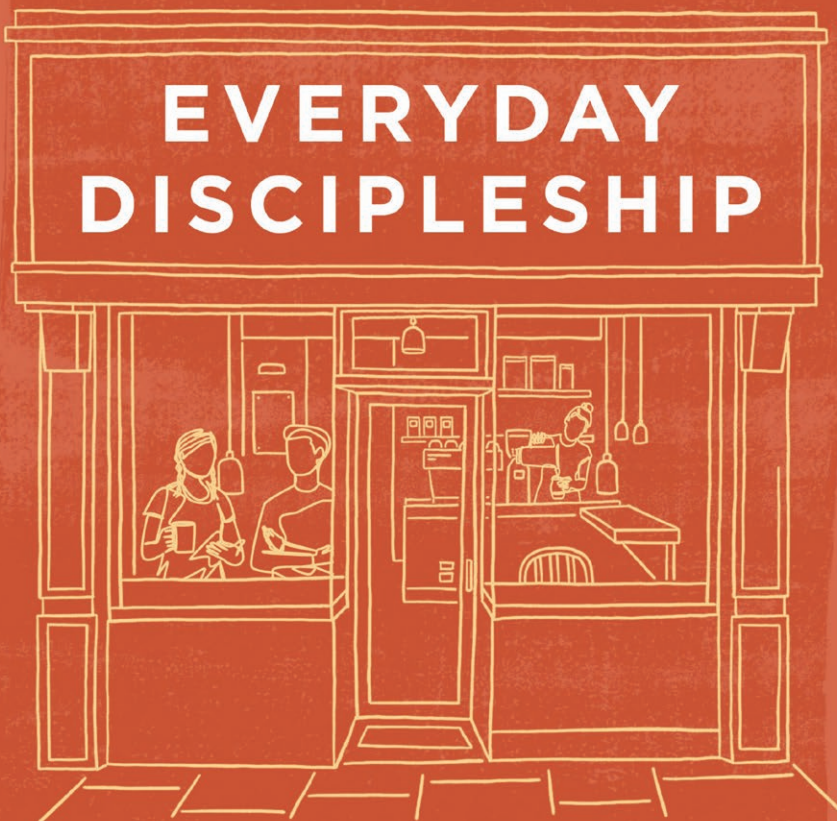


JEREMY TREAT

EVERYDAY DISCIPLESHIP



**HOW FAITH SHAPES THE
MOST PRACTICAL AREAS OF LIFE**



InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Taken from *Everyday Discipleship* by Jeremy Treat.

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Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

www.ivpress.com

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THE COMPARTMENTALIZED LIFE

Growing up in the church, I loved Jesus, but there was a massive gap between my faith and my everyday life.

I knew my eternity was secure but didn't know what it meant for today. I knew I was going to heaven but wasn't sure how to live on earth. I knew what I was saved *from* but had no idea what I was saved *for*. I knew I was supposed to pray before meals but didn't know why. Deep down, I had this sense that God was concerned with spiritual things but didn't care about my day-to-day life.

Many other Christians have had a similar experience. Maybe you have, too. Perhaps you love Jesus and know how to express it in church, but you wonder how loving him plays out in daily life. You might have questions like,

- Does God care about my work?
- Are hobbies a waste of time?
- Does it matter what I eat?
- Is there any spiritual value in art, science, or politics?
- Will God be disappointed in me if I take a nap instead of praying?
- Is technology distracting us from what is eternally significant?



- Does my body matter as much as my soul?
- What should I do with my sexual desires?
- Is it okay for Christians to experience anxiety or depression?
- Is relying on others a sign of spiritual weakness?

If you've struggled with questions like these, you're not alone. Many Christians have become accustomed to devoting themselves to Jesus and then not knowing how to connect the dots to the most practical areas of life.

THE SACRED-SECULAR DIVIDE

How did we get to a place of believing that Jesus is our *everything* but not knowing how he applies to hardly *anything* in our lives? I think it's largely because many Christians live with a sacred-secular divide.

There are the things that we assume God cares about and are therefore sacred: reading Scripture, praying, going to church, singing worship songs, serving, and so on. And then there are the things we think God doesn't care about and are therefore secular: work, food, rest, play, exercise, mental health, hobbies, politics, sexuality, relationships, the body, money, and so forth. The sacred-secular divide does not assume that these things are bad; they are just neutral or less important. God doesn't care about them *unless* they are used as instruments for explicitly spiritual purposes.

Sacred		Secular	
<i>Church</i>	<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Food</i>	<i>Play</i>
<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Worship</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>Exercise</i>
<i>Discipleship</i>	<i>Serving</i>	<i>Rest</i>	<i>Hobbies</i>
<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Tithing</i>	<i>Money</i>	<i>Body</i>

The sacred-secular divide creates a truncated view of Christianity that relegates God to a day of the week (Sunday), a part of our lives (spiritual), or a particular place (church building). It leads not to thriving humanity but to hyperspirituality.

Our lives end up resembling a dresser in a bedroom. A dresser has many different drawers, each providing a compartment for a particular type of clothing. There's a compartment for pants, another for shirts, and one for socks and underwear. Oftentimes, we compartmentalize our lives: There's a compartment for finances, another for sexuality, and others for emotions, relationships, and hobbies. Then, of course, there is the "spiritual" compartment. Jesus is supposed to stay there.

I have experienced this tension throughout my Christian life. When I was a kid in school, I didn't know why my studies mattered to my faith. When I was playing college basketball, I wasn't sure if God cared about sports. When I got my first job, I wondered if my work mattered for the kingdom. The sacred-secular divide left me with a fragmented faith, divided between compartments that never seemed to fit together.

I've seen the same struggle in others. A young woman working in Hollywood wonders whether the art she creates can really matter to God or if she has to tack on a Bible verse for it to count as spiritual. A mom at home changing diapers asks herself whether this endless cycle of wiping and feeding is just mundane work or whether God could actually delight in it. A man running on the treadmill questions whether strengthening his body is a selfish pursuit or something that could actually be offered to God. Whether in a studio, a nursery, or a gym, people often feel as if the most ordinary parts of life fall outside God's concern.

DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES

There are several devastating consequences of the sacred-secular divide. First, it leads to guilt and shame, since Christians cannot possibly



spend as much time on the “sacred” as they can on the “secular.” One may think, *I must be a terrible Christian if I work eight hours a day but only read my Bible for ten minutes.* This mindset inevitably leads to a class system within the church where pastors and missionaries are considered the only serious Christians.

Second, the sacred-secular divide encourages Christians to oppose what God declares good. People with this mentality often become anti-intellectual (even though God calls his people to love him with our minds), anti-science (even though God calls his people to understand his creation), anti-body (even though God makes us body and soul), and anti-environment (even though God’s first command is to care for the earth). The apostle Paul says, “To the pure, all things are pure” (Titus 1:15), but the sacred-secular divide encourages Christians to look down on earthly things as a waste of time at best or the devil’s workshop at worst.

Third, the sacred-secular divide causes many people to make cringe-worthy “Christian versions” of secular culture: Christian T-shirts, Christian movies, Christian coffee shops, and Christian music, as if something cannot be glorifying to God unless it explicitly has the name of Jesus on it. Rather than rejoicing in God’s beautiful work of creation, this view only delights in God’s work of redemption.

Worst of all, the sacred-secular divide reduces Jesus to a spiritual life coach rather than the King of creation. Relegated to the spiritual compartment, this Jesus only has power within one jurisdiction. The divide pretends that Jesus is Lord when he is really just a butler in service of our own personal agendas. Saying, “Jesus is Lord of my spiritual life,” is like saying, “I’m fasting in between meals.” It’s meaningless. Either Jesus is Lord over all, or he is not Lord at all.

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

The sacred-secular divide is the wrong framework. God did not intend for us to deny the goodness of his creation as if we are more spiritual than Jesus. Why, then, do so many Christians operate within this



framework? If it is not from the Bible, where did the sacred-secular divide come from? There are at least three sources.

Greek philosophy. Ancient Greek philosophy has had an enormous impact on our society, and it goes deeper than the names of fraternities and sororities. Christianity developed in a world dominated by Greek thought. A key part of Greek philosophy (especially a stream called Gnosticism) was dualism, which taught that the spiritual realm is good and the material realm is bad. For Greeks, therefore, their greatest aspiration was to escape the prison of the body for a spiritual, disembodied existence. Sound familiar? Baptize that thinking with biblical language like “the soul” and “heaven,” and you have a sacred-secular divide in which God cares about the spiritual and not the material.

Truncated biblical story. The Bible is essentially a four-chapter story: creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. But many Christians tell the story as if it is only about the fall and redemption. The message becomes reduced to, “You are a sinner, but Jesus is a Savior who will take you to heaven when you die.” While this statement is true, it presents only half the story when it is isolated from the opening act of creation and the closing vision of new creation. Without creation, we miss the goodness of God’s design and the purpose for which he made humanity. Without new creation, we miss the hope of God’s restoration and the promise that his kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. We are then left with a thin and disembodied gospel, one that has little to say to the workplace, to art, to politics, or to the most ordinary rhythms of daily life. Though it answers the question of how we are forgiven, it leaves us unsure of what we are to live for. In this truncated story, the gospel becomes merely about escaping earth rather than renewing it, about saving souls for another world but not following Christ in this one.

Misinterpretation of Scripture. The sacred-secular divide is prevalent also because of faulty interpretations of Scripture. Perhaps the most damaging of these interpretations is the way many Christians read Paul’s use of the word *flesh*. When Paul says, “I know that nothing



good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom 7:18), many Christians assume this means our soul is good while our body is bad. But when Paul uses the word *flesh*, he is usually referring not to our physical body but to our sinful nature.¹ He is *not* saying that our bodies are bad; rather, he affirms that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). A similar interpretive mistake is often made with the word *worldly*, which usually does not refer to the physical earth but to patterns in society that go against the grain of God’s good design. The Bible does not tell us to escape our bodies or the world but to glorify God in both.

How it plays out in daily life. The sacred-secular divide shows up most clearly in how people move through a typical week. On Sunday I go to church, where I read the Bible, pray, sing, and connect with other believers. It feels sacred because I know God cares about that. But on Monday morning as I brew coffee and eat breakfast, I wonder if God really cares about that part of my day, other than the quick prayer before the meal. Then I head into the office and spend eight hours answering emails, sitting in meetings, and working on projects. I can’t help but question if any of it has significance for God’s kingdom. On the bus ride home, I scroll through my phone and feel guilty afterward for not reading my Bible instead. Later that evening, I watch a baseball game on TV. It doesn’t seem wrong, but it also doesn’t feel like something that really matters to God. The week goes by like this, day after day, with most of my time and energy spent on things that don’t seem to carry any spiritual weight.

This is what it feels like to live in the sacred-secular divide. God is central on Sunday but seems distant on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Most of life feels spiritually empty, and the only time we feel close to him is during explicitly “spiritual” activities. And yet this is precisely the lie of the sacred-secular divide: It confines God to Sunday and blinds us to his presence in the very places we spend most of our lives.



LOOKING FOR A NEW FRAMEWORK

Once again, the sacred-secular divide is simply the wrong framework. It has led many people to a narrow understanding of the gospel and a truncated view of the Christian life, creating an “us versus them” mentality where Christians can’t appreciate anything by non-Christians and don’t know if their daily lives matter to God. We need to demolish the sacred-secular divide and raise in its place a vision for all of life under the dominion of Christ.



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