

PAUL GRIMMOND

**RIGHT
SIDE UP**

A person is skydiving upside down against a clear blue sky. They are wearing a red shirt and blue jeans. A large red parachute is deployed below them, with a black circular object hanging from its center. The parachute is fully inflated and has a scalloped edge.

**LIFE AS GOD
MEANT IT TO BE**

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I am of the firm conviction that thankfulness is a mark of the people of God. I am also painfully aware that it isn't nearly as significant a mark of my Christian life as I would like it to be. So let me say thanks. Thanks to God who turned me right side up 21 years ago, and who has faithfully kept me there, even when I wanted to turn upside down again. Thanks to my wonderful wife, Cathy, who is God's greatest gift to me and probably the best example I know of many of the things in this book. Thanks, too, to Anna, Ethan and Joel, whom I pray will always know life right side up. (And thanks for continuing to laugh at my jokes.)

I also want to thank the many people who have contributed in one way or another to the writing of this book. A special thanks to those who wrote down their experiences of coming to know Jesus and the impact of that on their lives. Not all the stories made it in, and many of the stories use assumed names for the sake of those involved. But you all know who you are: thank you.

Finally, thanks to Tony and Ian and the rest of the team at Matthias Media for giving me the financial freedom to write. I am extremely grateful for the privilege, and for the trust you have shown in me.

Paul Grimmond

May, 2009

1. LIFE UP

1. LIFE UPSIDE DOWN

I could see the stars revolving slowly around a hole in the floor that my feet couldn't quite reach. I tried to move but couldn't. I was pinned to the wall by a force that was rearranging my internal organs in a way their maker had never intended. When was this going to stop?

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the whining noise diminished. Oddly, I was slipping further from the floor. My neck began to curve at an unfortunate angle as my head made contact with something solid and I slumped, defeated, onto the ceiling.

Where was I? Why was I here? What was happening? What on earth was distorting the laws of gravity? What was about to happen to the contents of my stomach?

Then I remembered. It was a girl. It's always a girl, isn't it? But this was some girl. It had begun innocently enough—we just enjoyed hanging out—she was fun and she laughed at my jokes. We always had more to talk about than time to talk, and she made me feel like I was walking on air. Yet here I was, unable to walk at all, curled up on the floor of some fairground attraction that spun so fast that you couldn't work out which way was up. What should I do now?

Before we go any further—yes, you are reading the right book. This really is a book about what it means to become a follower of Jesus, and not some trashy romance novel you picked up from the bargain bin. I began with this story because it reminds me of the roller-coaster ride involved in coming to know Jesus for the first time.

I grew up in a home with almost no exposure to God. By the time I was fifteen I'd been to church twice, both times because of relatives who were 'no longer with us'. It was hardly a promising introduction to Christianity. But I had some friends who really took this Jesus thing seriously, and they kept asking me to talks so that I could find out more about him. The more I understood, the more I realized I'd been living with my eyes closed. I had been sure Jesus was a fairytale—a crutch invented by people who couldn't stand living in the real world. But I didn't have good reasons for thinking that way; it was just what I'd always believed. So I started to seriously investigate Jesus. As I did, I was struck by two things I couldn't ignore. First, Jesus was real—he lived and walked and talked in the same world I lived in. Second, he talked about the big issues of life.

During the next twelve months, as I began to consider the Jesus who really lived, I found him to be a man totally unlike anyone I'd ever met before. But I can't tell you whether fear or excitement was the stronger emotion. You don't need to hang around Jesus for long to realize he means business. What are you supposed to do with someone who says things like, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26)?

But even though his teaching was uncomfortable, the more

I found out about Jesus, the more I wanted to know him better. He loved people in a unique way. He always seemed to know what to say and how to say it. He could be so angry at the evil injustices of the stuck-up religious leaders of his day, and yet so compassionate towards those who needed it most. I found myself being drawn to Jesus, almost against my will. But I also realized that making the decision to follow him would mean putting everything in my life up for grabs. He was saying that he had to be more important than anyone or anything else in my life. And that meant turning my life upside down. It meant doing something about my anger. It meant changing what I thought about things like sex before marriage. It meant changing things that I was probably too scared to think about.

In some ways, meeting Jesus was just like meeting the girl who took me on that wild fairground ride. I met her and liked her and wanted to hang out with her. But as I did so, I found myself taking risks. When I went on that ride, I knew I was going to feel unwell. Ever since I was a kid I had suffered from motion sickness. But there we were, standing in front of the Gravitron, and she loved it and I wanted to be with her and do her stuff. So much so, that when the ride attendant told us you could spin yourself upside down on the wall when it was at half-speed, I did it. Why did I do it? I look back now and realize I probably didn't have very good reasons. It was the thrill of the moment and she seemed fun.

But that's where the similarity with following Jesus disappears. Deciding to respond to Jesus isn't just about the thrill of the moment and the risk of throwing up at the end of the ride. Jesus is asking for something much bigger than that. He's asking you to trust him with your life. That's what my mate Grant came

to understand a few years ago. I'll let him tell his story.

GRANT'S STORY

I was raised as a Christian—at least, to begin with. However, around the time I was eight, family life started to change. Busyness set in, and God, church and prayer got squeezed out. I was quite confused about this, but was assured that “Christians don’t have to go to church every week as a rule”.

The first sense that something might be wrong in my family came in high school when I met Christians who were genuinely committed to Jesus. They let Jesus rule every aspect of their lives, and wanted the good news about him to spread no matter the cost to their reputations or lifestyles. I couldn’t understand why they were so willing to suffer!

These Christians sparked an intense personal conflict. The conflict involved two inconsistent truths that I desperately tried to hold in tension. The first truth was that my parents and siblings were still Christian because they said they were, even if they totally didn’t look like it. The second truth was that (as the Bible says) “faith without works is dead”, and not all who say “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven.

To address this internal conflict would have involved admitting to myself that my parents and siblings were fatally mistaken and literally doomed. That was a heartbreaking truth I simply didn’t know how to deal with on my own as a child. So I pretended it was false. Under this logic, I myself didn’t have to go to church regularly either, and could quietly disobey God when I really wanted to.

The Christians I socialized with at university were confused by my inconsistent behaviour; baffled that I seemed to know the gospel so well and yet be totally content to miss Bible study,

sometimes for ten weeks at a time. Finally, after many years, my Bible study leader told me to get in or get out. I needed to stop toying with Jesus. He also insisted that I attend a five-day conference about knowing God from the Bible. I reluctantly agreed. The conference was five days of uninterrupted meditation on God's holiness and my sinfulness. It allowed me to consider my internal conflict and what to do about it. God changed me irrevocably.

I started to let Jesus rule areas of my life I'd previously pushed him out of. This led to me committing to regular Sunday evening church attendance even if it meant missing a Sunday evening family dinner (an important family event).

This seemingly little change crystallized the tension within my family. Previously, I had only ever gone to church when there wasn't a family dinner on. But once I started going almost every week, my parents felt like they'd been snubbed for church. In their eyes, I'd been bewitched by overzealous, excessively religious despots who had wickedly convinced me to put church above family.

Unfortunately, this was never fully addressed through healthy family discussion. My family, like many, had evolved a complex set of silently agreed upon taboo conversation topics. It was a heavy taboo to talk about religion or Christianity, particularly on a deep or personal level.

Of course, I wanted to talk about Christianity like nothing else. But the topic was too volatile. Every time I tried to talk about it the conversation would spontaneously combust into an argument. So the tension just simmered silently.

Eventually, after many months, it became clear to my family that the church hadn't bewitched me. They came to understand that I still loved them and that being Christian didn't mean I would never talk to them again. The big lesson I learned was

that they could only get this by long-term actions, not words. However there is still an awkward moment when I walk into the kitchen after church. I know that my choice to go to church still raises questions, and implies some sort of criticism.

It's very tempting for me to capitulate and fall back into line: church attendance when and if convenient, lifestyle choices informed by Christianity rather than ruled by it, and no more talking about Jesus. But what I'd really be doing is pushing away Jesus. That's simply not an option—I can't deny my creator and redeemer!

All my childhood I was terrified something would break up my family. Ironically, I've become the most divisive person in it. While I still love my family, am grateful to my parents and want to spend time with all of them, I refuse to pretend that everything is okay between all of us and God. I will also not give up on patiently and gently trying to tell my family about Jesus. I refuse to give up, because God will always be with me.

Following Jesus

Grant came to understand that being a Christian is about putting Jesus first. This book is all about what it means to put Jesus first. And you might think that we will spend most of our time talking about what this means in practice—like being part of a church, or reading the Bible, or praying to God, or living a certain way. But as useful and important as those things are, they are not the heart of it. The most important thing—by a long way—is really understanding who Jesus is and why he came to earth. And in God's plan, you can only understand who Jesus is and why he came to earth by going back a few steps, and understanding what God has been doing in our world since the very beginning.

So the first half of this book is about the biggest ideas and themes of the Bible. It's about who Jesus is, and why he came to live and die and rise again. I've been a Christian for 21 years now, and in some ways I'm still only learning day by day to live as someone who belongs to Jesus. But the most important thing I've learned in those years is that knowing Jesus better is the key to being Christian.

That's what I want to do in this book—help you to know Jesus better. Of course, what I write will reflect something of my own life and family and culture. But I hope it does more than that. I hope it allows you to hear from Jesus himself about what it means to look at life from his point of view and live accordingly. I hope it will help you to see why Jesus turned the world of his day upside down, and why you should let him turn your world upside down too—or rather, right side up.

AUTHOR PAUL GRIMMOND WRITES:

I set out to write a book for new Christians, to explain what it means to be a Christian and what the lifelong adventure of following Jesus is like. But I soon realized that what Jesus wants to say to a new Christian is really the same thing he wants to keep saying to the seasoned saint: “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”. My prayer is that this book will persuade you of the truth of those words, and help you live like you believe them. It’s a book for the brand new Christian that should challenge every believer—whether you’ve been following Jesus for five minutes or fifty years.



Before joining Matthias Media in 2008, Paul Grimmond was Anglican Chaplain to the University of NSW, and the senior pastor of Unichurch. Paul is a gifted and well-known Bible teacher, and lives with his wife, Cathy, and their three children in Sydney’s east.



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