

PLAYING *for an*
AUDIENCE
of ONE

PLAYING *for an*
AUDIENCE
of ONE *Learning to
Live for
Jesus Alone*

JOSHUA BROOKS



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for me to live out God's calling mean more than you'll ever know. I love you.

Finally, if there are people who get something out of this book, fantastic. But ultimately, this book is dedicated to the One who called me to write it. Where my ability to communicate clearly and compellingly has fallen short (and I'm sure it has at points), my prayer, Lord Jesus, is that my heart's desire to be obedient has brought You joy.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



I WAS SEVENTEEN years old when I committed the rest of my life to following Jesus. I had all sorts of ideas about what God would want for and from me. But just about the first thing He did was tap me on the shoulder, and call out my tendency to try and make myself look good in other people's eyes. Managing one's reputation is standard operating procedure in high school. And as I soon discovered, it was fairly typical among Christians, too. However, as I also learned, the Holy Spirit wasn't interested in me settling for what was common practice—even if it was common among His people.

I remember God's still small voice saying to me, *'If you stop jockeying for people's approval and worrying about what other people think about you, I will guard your reputation and allow you to enjoy the freedom that comes from living for My approval alone.'*

It seemed odd that this would be one of the first things God would say to me. I figured there had to be more important things He wanted to do in and through me. But seventeen years later, I'm as convinced as ever that living for Jesus' approval is His highest calling on my life. Everything flows from this.

I certainly haven't arrived when it comes to playing for an Audience of One. Some days I still feel like that insecure seventeen year old who cares too much about what people are thinking of me. But more often

than not I really am experiencing the joy and freedom that comes from simply living for the approval of Jesus.

My prayer is that in reading this book, God might use it to help you experience this same joy and freedom.

Joshua Brooks
Warm Beach, Washington
February 2008

THE STAKES ARE HIGHER THAN YOU THINK



*“The trouble with so many people is that
the voice of their neighbors sounds louder
in their ears than the voice of God.”*

—H.G. Wells

IN 1520, MARTIN LUTHER was summoned by Emperor Charles V to appear at the Imperial Assembly in the city of Worms. He faced charges of teaching doctrine that contradicted some of the traditional tenets of the Roman Church. Luther’s friends tried to dissuade him from going to Worms, warning him of the impending danger waiting for him there. But Luther unswervingly held his ground, replying, “You can expect from me everything except fear or recanting. I shall not flee, much less renounce my convictions.”

Luther set his face like a flint toward Worms. “Not go to Worms!” he said. “I shall go to Worms though there were as many devils as tiles on the roofs.”

When the proceedings began, Counselor Eck held up Luther’s writings and called upon him to recant: “Will Luther reject his books and the errors they contain?”

The father of the Protestant Reformation then answered with the words that would ring through history: “Unless I can be instructed and

convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds of reasoning, then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. God help me. Amen. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise!”¹

We love stories of courage and conviction. We’re inspired by the underdog who stands toe to toe with the giant, resolving to die, if need be, for the sake of the truth. There are two reasons. First of all, we inherently know that this is the way we’re supposed to live. Even those of us who feel handcuffed by fear know that ultimately it is “neither safe nor wise to act against conscience.” And the truth is most of us wish we had more courage to live our lives with this kind of boldness.

The other reason we love these stories is we have a sense that the stakes are high. It’s not just the health of our own soul that’s on the line when we take a stand. When we take the high road amidst opposition and peer pressure, we really can change our world for the better. It’s always been that way:

- Martin Luther King, Jr., helped topple the strongholds of racism and prejudice in America by staying true to his vision, “I have a dream!”
- Patrick Henry inspired a fledgling nation of farmers to take on the most sophisticated military the world had ever known, shouting, “Give me liberty or give me death!”
- Mary, a peasant teenager, faced the criticism and shame of a pregnancy out of wedlock, agreeing to give birth to the Messiah, and saying, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38).
- Esther used her influence to rescue the Jewish people, risking her life and saying, “I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish” (Est. 4:16).
- David, a young shepherd boy, ignored the fearful voices of his fellow Israelites and fought Goliath, the heavyweight champion of the Philistine army, saying, “You come against me with sword and spear, but I come against you in the name of the Lord!” (1 Sam. 17:45).

- Moses, a stuttering, eighty-year-old fugitive, stood up against the military superpower of the fifteenth century B.C., proclaiming, “Let my people go!” (Ex. 5:1).

Granted, the stands we take in life may not change the face of the whole world. After all, very few of us live in a context that resembles that of these famous historical figures. But that doesn’t mean we can’t significantly impact our little corner of the world. Living out our convictions really does have the potential to make a kingdom difference in our sphere of influence. Regardless of how seemingly ordinary we might feel about the roles we play in life, the stands we take matter. *The stakes are higher than we think:*

- For the employee, who is willing to stand up to his co-workers (and even his superiors) when the ethical high road is forsaken.
- For parents, who long for their children’s affections, but resolve to discipline them anyway, even though they may incur feelings of resentment from them.
- For the pastor, who pursues the vision God has called him to despite what some of the people in the church might think about him.
- For the single mom, who keeps taking her children to church, regardless of the sting she feels every time she gets asked, “So where is your husband?”
- For the teenager, who speaks out about her spiritual convictions at school even in the face of mockery and ridicule from her peers.

Unfortunately, we don’t always live up to who we want to be. I wish I didn’t care what people thought about me, but sometimes I do. I wish it took outright persecution before I began to shy away from speaking forth my convictions. But sometimes it doesn’t take much peer pressure at all before I find myself going the way of people pleasing.

After all, I want people to like me.

Some of us avoid speaking out about what we believe because we can't stand the thought of someone thinking badly about us. Others are inclined to people-please because if we were to speak the truth in certain situations, it might lead to an uncomfortable confrontation. That might produce pain or resentment in other people, and we don't want to risk losing their affections and approval. So we play it safe.

The root cause for our inclination to hedge our bets and people-please is that we are more concerned with what people think than with what God thinks. As I re-read that last sentence, I wince at what feels like the blunt edge of a sword, but there is no way to soften the blow. For many of us, our ears have become attuned to the opinions of people, all the while becoming deaf to the voice of God. As H.G. Wells once said, "The trouble with so many people is that the voice of their neighbors sounds louder in their ears than the voice of God."²

I am all too aware of this people-pleasing tendency in my own life. I spend far too much time trying to figure out what people think about me. I find myself mentally calculating what my "stock" is worth on the trading floor of public opinion. I wonder how certain decisions I make will affect my reputation in the eyes of other people. I don't even have to be intentional about thinking these kinds of thoughts. My mind just naturally drifts this way. And I'm not alone. As a pastor, I daily encounter what a struggle this issue is for many followers of Jesus. It's an epidemic that is plaguing the church, crippling many of us from living in the freedom God desires for us.

Why do so many of us long for approval from other people? Is our craving for affirmation just some baseless neurosis? Is it simply the result of low self-esteem? No. The fact of the matter is we were created with an approval-sized void that only can be filled by the One who made us. Most of us mentally ascend to this truth. Unfortunately, we still settle for a shadow of the real thing, grasping for glory and affirmation from other human beings instead of from the One who wants to give it to us.

It may sound unspiritual, and even self-centered, but God actually *wants* to give us glory. C.S. Lewis writes:

When I began to look into this matter I was shocked to find such different Christians as Milton, Johnson, and Thomas Aquinas taking

heavenly glory quite frankly in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures—fame with God, approval...by God. And then, when I had thought it over, I saw that this view was scriptural; nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine accolade, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” With that, a good deal of what I had been thinking all my life fell down like a house of cards. I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child—not in a conceited child, but a good child—as its great and undisguised pleasure in being praised. Not only in a child, either, but even in a dog or a horse. Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures—nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure of a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator. I am not forgetting how horribly this most innocent desire is parodied in our human ambitions, or how quickly, in my own experience, the lawful pleasure of praise from those whom it was my duty to please turns into the deadly poison of self-admiration. But I thought I could detect a moment—a very, very short moment—before this happened, during which the satisfaction of having pleased those whom I rightly loved and rightly feared was pure. And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please.³

This is what we were made for...

The response to the siren voices that seduce you into seeking after your neighbors’ approval is to learn to play for an Audience of One: to raise your thoughts to the glory that only God can confer upon you, and attune your ears to hear His voice amidst the competing voices that vie for your attention. This is the antidote for the people-pleasing disease. You don’t have to live under the tyranny of others’ opinions another day. In fact, as you learn to play for an Audience of One, you will begin to experience the thrill of living your life the way God intended you to live. You no longer have to live in bondage to what other people think. Your days more and more will be marked by freedom, courage, conviction, and the kind of peace that allows you to sleep well at night, knowing you have been true to who God has called you to be.

My hunch is that you want to play for an Audience of One. Most followers of Jesus do. But I also know merely being told to do so won't get me there. For the most part, I already know what I'm supposed to do. As the eighteenth century doctor Samuel Johnson said, "People need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed."⁴

What I need are poignant reminders that jog my memory about why it's worth it to keep striving after this goal. What I need are stories of real people whose courageous resolve in the face of opposition inspire me to live for something greater than public approval. What I need are biblical examples and everyday illustrations that show me what it looks like to play for an Audience of One. So if you're like me, and you're frustrated and weary of settling for a shadow of the real thing, then turn the page. Let's learn to play for an Audience of One.