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Chapter 1

What is Advertising God?

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

{ Colossians 3:17 }

Being one third Italian on her mother’s side, Marcy is a woman who knows and loves good, authentic Tuscan food. So when the new Italian restaurant Zanipolo’s opened down the street from her home, Marcy tossed her husband Frank the car keys and off they went.

Expecting the usual pedestrian fare and teenage servers that were hallmarks of all the so-called Italian restaurants and bistros that had come and gone in the area before, Marcy was pleasantly surprised to discover this restaurant appeared to be the real deal. Everything from the beef carpaccio to the chicken marsala to the cannolis was genuine Italian through and through, and the wait staff was personable, attentive and knowledgeable about the food and its preparation. Even chef Zanipolo himself was born and raised in Trieste.

The food and service were so good, Marcy had a standing reservation twice a week to eat at Zanipolo’s. When she wasn’t there, she raved about chef Z and his creative cuisine to her friends and friends of friends, her hairdresser, her exercise class and her coworkers. If the topic of food ever came up, everyone knew Marcy would jump in and plug her favorite Italian restaurant with great enthusiasm. It wasn’t long before Marcy’s friends began calling her Mozzarella Marcy because she bragged on Zanipolo’s so much.

Isn’t that the way it is with you, too? If you found a fabulous product that exceeded your expectations, dined on exceptionally fine food, or received superior customer service, wouldn’t you tell people you know about your experience? Wouldn’t you enthusiastically recommend that product, restaurant or store on a regular basis? As consumers who find comfort and security in the sanctuary of shared experience, our desire is to tell others about our positive encounters in the marketplace hoping they will have as good as an experience, if not a better one, than we had.

It's the same unabashed enthusiasm and conviction you should have as you serve, worship and praise our Holy God. That exuberant, almost euphoric feeling that comes from knowing you've been saved and redeemed by the blood and grace of Jesus Christ. That joy and peace you gain by accepting Christ and reserving a place in His eternal kingdom. There ought to be a part of you that can't wait to share your faith and testimony with others so they don't miss out on experiencing the joy and peace that comes from having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I call this kind of impassioned joy advertising God. Advertising God simply means letting others know you are a dedicated, faithful and loving Christian servant through your words, actions and deeds. It means instead of privatizing your beliefs, you go public with them. Instead of hiding behind your faith, you courageously live it out for all to see. Instead of feeling ashamed at being labeled a Christian, you rejoice in it.

Maybe this already sounds a lot like you. Maybe you're the kind of person who actively and passionately talks up God or does good works for Him in any situation without fear, hesitation or concerns about your reputation around the office or neighborhood. That's great! You're advertising God with an obedient heart and faithfully living out Christ's command in the Great Commission.

But many other Christians wonder why is it easier to talk about good mechanics, honest contractors and delicious cheeseburgers than it is about God. Why it's easier to spread the news about a great sale at the mall than it is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ? Why it's easier to invite friends to a favorite restaurant than it is to invite them to church? Why it's easier to sit down than stand up for our Christian beliefs? Why it's easier for us to promote secular self-help books than it is the Bible (which, ironically, is the ultimate self-help book!)?

There's no easy answer, of course. There's just something about verbally sharing your faith or engaging in acts that are overtly Christian that sometimes makes you feel uncomfortable. As a believer who adamantly professes to love and follow Christ, you know it shouldn't be this way. And you're right. When it comes to talking up all the wonderful benefits and features of God the Father Almighty and Jesus Christ, too many times we let opportunity after opportunity slip by without saying a single word to praise Jesus Christ or without lifting a finger to participate in God's work, ministries or outreach programs.

And that's not how God wants His people to be. If living the Christian life was played out like a sporting event, this kind of passive and indifferent behavior would be tantamount to blowing a save, shanking a punt, clanging a dunk off the back iron, or muffing a game-winning touchdown pass. Unlike big-time sports however, thousands of watchful eyes probably aren't on you when you drop the ball, but God's eyes are. He's your biggest fan and the one you disappoint most when you fail to publicize all His winning attributes.

After listening to other Christians and hearing about their struggles and insecurities over sharing and expressing their faith, God enlightened me with one of those classic "a-ha" moments. I realized my inadequacies as a "salesperson" for God was not unique. Nor was the problem mine and mine alone to battle. Just like me, there are plenty of fearful and apprehensive Christians out there who consistently struggle with the very same issues when it comes to sharing and living true to their faith. Maybe you are one of them. The mere fact you're reading this book means you probably are. But that doesn't make you a bad person or a bad believer. None of us is perfect. We Christians are all in this advertising God thing together, and we want to find productive and tangible ways to shed our fears and insecurities and promote God with the excitement and passion we know He requires and deserves.

God laid the challenge of addressing these very issues on my heart, and being employed in the advertising business, I began to question if some of the same principles of secular advertising could be applied to the faith lives of Christians to help us become more passionate, confident and effective witnesses, or advertisers, for Christ. As a copywriter, I'm paid by my clients to promote a wide array of products without ever being at a loss for words. Why should talking up God be any different, I wondered. He is, after all, the greatest "product" known to humankind!

As God worked within me, the idea of writing this book took root. Much like Elijah's experience in the Old Testament, God's plan for me wasn't exposed in the rumbling staccato of a powerful thunderstorm, but in a gentle, persistent whisper. Maybe you know the kind of whisper I'm talking about. Soft enough to easily ignore or discount, but dogged enough that you come to know it's what God wants you to do. Perhaps like me, you were uncertain how exactly to proceed, unsure if that something dogging you really is God's plan for you, and if it is, you struggle to get past feeling so very unworthy to even attempt such a task. Yet consider and choose you God does in spite of all your shortcomings. I wasn't sure exactly what to write or even where to begin, but I recalled Samuel's response as God was summoning him, "Here I am, Lord, your servant is listening."

Has God been whispering to you, challenging you to pursue a mission or worship opportunity, reach out to someone in need, volunteer to teach Sunday school, join a Bible study, or get more involved in the church? Be like Samuel. Let God know you hear what He is saying and that you're ready, willing and able to shift your faith into high gear and drive others to a happier, more fulfilled life in Jesus Christ.

Little Things Make a Big Difference

Advertising God isn't just talking the talk. It's also walking the walk. It is the little things you do every day that show others you are a dedicated follower of Christ. It doesn't have to be some elaborate message or presentation. It can be as simple as wearing a cross or religious-themed jewelry, inviting someone to church, saying the blessing before a meal, sharing your spiritual values with a friend or coworker, reading your Bible on a commuter train or airplane, leading a prayer, listening to Christian music at home or in your car, or performing a random act of kindness in Christ's name. The point is, advertising God is not always overt. More often than not, advertising God is usually something simple, unplanned and unrehearsed.

Whether in one-on-one conversation, heading up a Bible study group, or counseling a friend, advertising God is something every Christian is called—and expected—to do. Instead of always asking God to do for you, perhaps it's time you started asking what you can do for God by taking advantage of the personality characteristics and gifts you've been blessed with. Watch those who fervently and successfully advertise God and you'll see they possess such traits as empathy, imagination, objectivity, persistence, creativity, patience and humility. They don't shy away from opportunities to share their love for God and neither should you.

When you consider all the things Jesus has done for you, you should be so fired up for Christ you can hardly contain your joy. You should always be ready to tell anyone, anytime and anywhere what an amazing God you love and worship, and how He has impacted your life in countless and immeasurable ways. This kind of inner happiness should be like a message you can't wait to deliver, a zealous exuberance you simply cannot contain. You should want to get out there and start telling others just how awesome God really is. Take inspiration from the ever-popular Energizer Bunny and just keep witnessing and witnessing and witnessing. Even in the

face of adversity, the bunny always keeps going and going and so should you. But it's the getting going that is part of the problem many Christians face.

We Must Become the Change We Wish to See

Most of us have a strong desire to do God's work and help make the world a better place, so no Christ-centered believer intentionally sets out to deny or disobey God. Certainly the headstrong disciple Peter didn't. But like so many of us in our daily experiences, Peter found himself in a chaotic and confusing situation where he could either boldly declare his faith or fearfully retreat into silence. It's the same with many Christians today. We proudly proclaim we love the Lord with all our heart at church, when we're in prayer or socializing with like-minded individuals, but when it comes time to put our faith into action or seek praise opportunities outside of our comfort zone, many of these same Christians find it's much easier and much safer to avoid the "dangers" of being known as a follower of Christ. They simply pass up one chance after another to advertise God rather than risk the possibility of contempt, embarrassment or alienation from friends and peers.

So how do you reinvent yourself and change from one who avoids advertising God to one who sincerely enjoys and actively seeks out opportunities to shamelessly promote God? Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."¹ To help you achieve true change, you have to unburden yourself from all the obstacles, inhibitions and bad habits that prevent you becoming an impassioned advertiser of God. Stop letting your action, or inaction as it were, be governed by fear and tentativeness and start being receptive to God's love and guidance in your life. And instead of trusting God only up to a certain point, place your confidence wholly and completely in God and let Him lead you where He wants you to go. While it's true God never promises the life of a Christian believer will be a bed of roses, He does pledge to strengthen and empower you through the Holy Spirit when you get pricked by all those thorns along the way. So cast aside your doubts and insecurities, and become more responsive to letting God work through you and your abilities to accomplish great and mighty things. You'll be amazed at all you and God can do!

Advertising God in Real Life:

The men's group at Thomas' church has a weekend retreat coming up. The retreat's theme is Breaking the Power of Lust and Addiction. Thomas, himself a recovering alcoholic, has been asked to be one of the Saturday morning speakers, and he is excited about sharing his testimony with a large group. For some time, he has been praying for God to help him turn his weakness into a powerful tool he can use to help others struggling with similar problems.

A few weeks before the retreat, Thomas gets an e-mail from his boss informing Thomas that he will be needed that very same Saturday morning to deliver an important presentation. Thomas calls his boss back, explains his conflict and requests the presentation be rescheduled. His boss says no, the meeting must proceed as planned. Could another manager make the presentation, Thomas asks. Again, his boss answers no. Making these kinds of presentations was one of Thomas' strengths, after all.

Thomas hangs up confused and dejected. On the one hand, he doesn't want to miss the opportunity God has given him to share his faith. On the other, Thomas certainly doesn't want to jeopardize his career. After much hand wringing, Thomas feels there is only one choice he can make. He starts to call the retreat leader and cancel his speaking engagement, but has the nagging feeling that this is very much a watershed moment in his faith life. He replaces the

phone and immediately begins to pray. Later that night Thomas feels God strongly giving him the answer to his dilemma.

Though concerned about his job security, Thomas calls his boss first thing the next morning to inform him that he must honor his original commitment to speak at the retreat. The company will simply have to get someone else to make the presentation or reschedule it. The boss is frustrated, but agrees to see what he can do. Thomas nearly begins to acquiesce, but decides to abide by his decision regardless of the consequences.

Thomas advertises God by putting Christ first even in the face of potential job loss or reprimand.

In Philippians 4:9, Paul encourages the believers in Philippi by writing “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.” These very words could have come as a directive from Christ himself during His ministry time on earth. Effectively advertising God requires you to do more than just read the Bible, say a prayer every so often or listen to a sermon once a week. It calls you to put your faith into action whatever the circumstances may be. If you find that you’re hesitant, consider that God may have put you in this very position on this very day for this very reason—to share your witness, to offer a loving Christian hand, to make it known you are a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ. He puts you in the right place at the right time. All you have to do is trust God to give you the courage and the words. Don’t risk being like Peter and deny your faith, even if you’re not sure what the reaction or outcome will be.

Being a Christian Isn’t a Part-Time Job

Advertising God touts the benefits of the risen Lord and eternal life, and informs others of who God is and how He conducts business. You can’t sit back and hope someone else does the job. You have to get involved. It’s up to Christian believers like you and I to promote God by putting our faith into action in the best ways we know how and by taking full advantage of our spiritual gifts. On God’s team, there are no second-stringers. It’s time for Christians to get up off the bench and get actively involved in the game, especially if you’re one who has been riding the pines for way too long. To borrow another analogy, it’s time to come out of the darkness so you can be seen living and testifying in the light. Now, more than ever, Christian action and voices need to be seen and heard. You have to be loud and proud. It is your time to stand up and like Samuel declare, “Here I am, Lord.”

You can’t turn your Christianity on and off or just walk and talk like a Christian when you feel like it. When we accept Christ as our personal Lord and Savior and pledge to put Him first, we are called into active duty, working to complete the ongoing task of promoting God to people of all faiths and denominations, not just the select few we deem worthy or the ones we associate with inside our community circle.

In this era of political correctness and the “if-it-feels-good-do-it” mentality, perhaps you too have expressed the same lament as the prophet Isaiah when he cries out in 42:14, “For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back.” Notice how Isaiah’s words resonate with regret and missed opportunity. Maybe you’ve felt the same sting after missing out on a golden chance to advertise God. Don’t think of advertising God as an intrusive and burdensome part of the Christian lifestyle. Consider it a joyful honor and privilege to advertise God! After all, He’s chosen you to be His messenger here, there and everywhere your faith journey takes you.

Learn to Please God, Not People

I can't tell you how many times I've had a simple witnessing opportunity handed right to me by God, and I fearfully let the moment pass without so much as saying a word or making a move to get involved. I was afraid of what that person or group might think of me, what they might say about me, and of repercussions that may follow. In hindsight, most of those fears were greatly exaggerated and unfounded. Nevertheless, at the time the fears had a pronounced affect on my ability to be the kind of courageous Christian witness God could count on every single day.

Maybe you can relate to these feelings. The apostle Paul certainly could. In Galatians 1:10, he addresses this very real human condition when he writes, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ." This scripture verse captures the very essence of this book. When trying to please people rather than obey God, many of us find ourselves fearfully retreating instead of faithfully and confidently stepping forward with that "here I am" attitude God desires of all who sincerely and completely dedicate their lives to Jesus Christ. Far too often we're more concerned about what other people think about us than what God thinks about us. Today, when speech and actions are restrained under the guise of political correctness, some of us dare not say or do anything that could possibly offend certain groups or individuals. I assure you, however, that watering down God's message in order to prevent hurting someone's feelings or to protect your reputation is extremely offensive to our Lord and Savior. And ultimately, it is His opinion of you that really matters, not what other humans think. As a disciple of Christ, you are not called to tell people only what they *want* to hear, but to tell them all the things God says they *need* to hear.

If the description above sounds like you, you're probably wondering what you can do differently in your approach to creating a more Christ-focused lifestyle and attitude. First of all, be extremely proud of your spiritual beliefs and the holy God you worship and serve. Give praise and thanks to Him every chance you get, not just when it's convenient and "safe" for you. Don't worry about whether it's the right or wrong time or who is around to see and hear you. Who cares what other people think? You're here to please Christ, not other people.

You cannot be an effective witness for Christ while simultaneously trying to placate others through your words and actions. You must abide by your commitment to Christ and diligently go about the business of advertising God regardless of what others say or think about what you are doing. When Christians act as if people hold the key to our salvation, they shackle themselves to their own wants and desires and lose their spiritual focus by putting those same wants and needs before God.

Ideally, as you grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ, the louder your praises should become and the more you should want to hype His amazing love, forgiveness, guidance and salvation grace with all those around you. When people see and hear you praising God and His perpetual fountain of grace, they too want to experience the same kind of unrestrained joy and servitude as you. They look at you and wonder what you have that they don't. Your advertising influence can help foster a real desire in others to reap the benefits of everything God promises to those who accept Him.

Jesus Christ willingly endured a painful, humiliating death to save you and I from eternal separation from God. Jesus was beaten, tortured, ridiculed, spat upon and humiliated. Jesus could have simply walked away from it all, but He faithfully fulfilled God's divine purpose up until

His very last breath. Considering all that Christ did and does for us still, the very least we can do is unceasingly honor, serve and praise Him for as long as we inhabit this earth.

You Don't Have to be in Sales to be a Salesperson for God

Just because you're not an advertising professional, expert speaker, writer or motivator, don't think you can't advertise God every bit as well as the next person. It doesn't matter where you are on your faith growth line. Advertising God is something anyone from the neophyte Christian to those mature in his or her faith can do with great effectiveness. All you have to do is talk about someone you love who showers you with unconditional love. Someone who fills your life with an abundance of joy, hope, comfort and blessings. Someone who always hears and discerns your individual prayer from the millions who are simultaneously praying. Someone who is always there ready to forgive and restore. And if you still feel like you're not communicating the point, then let your Christ-first actions speak for you.

We love, worship and serve a truly awesome God. It's time to pick up your Cross and proudly give God His rightful due in front of others instead of hoarding your joy in Christ all to yourself. You can't assume someone else will be the one who does it either—advertising God, as you've seen, begins with you!

Unfortunately, we've all passed on a prime opportunity to advertise our faith at one time or another. Maybe it was the end of a long day, maybe you had someplace else to be, maybe you weren't feeling well or particularly inspired, maybe it seemed like too much of a hassle, or maybe you were guilty of prejudging and you just didn't think advertising God would have any kind of tangible effect on that person or group.

Missing a chance to advertise God happens to even the best and most faithful of Christians, but when it does, you may feel guilty, sinful and remorseful afterwards. That's probably because, deep down in your heart, you know you could have handled the situation better, and you really wish you had a second chance to prove it. You know you should have put forth a stronger effort, then spent the necessary time doing God's work. You know serving others in the name of Christ is what God wants you to do. But, if you're not careful, nothing changes day after day until pretty soon, you become callous, indifferent, and maybe even oblivious, to the very real and pressing need those who are without Christ have for seeing and hearing dedicated Christians like yourself advertise the benefits of our loving God.

Even for active Christians, the trappings of a passive attitude are easy to fall into and tough to get out of. That "do-nothing" attitude can be extremely frustrating, especially when you enthusiastically tell family, friends, neighbors, coworkers and acquaintances all about a positive experience you've had as a consumer in the marketplace, but remain silent when it comes to extolling the love and benefits God offers.

Something so seemingly simple—promoting and praising the awesome God we love so much with others around us—is something that's surprisingly difficult for many faithful Christians to do. And because of that pent up fear and passiveness, it seems many Christians would rather opt for a root canal or undergo a cavity search than share their faith with unbelievers or readily talk up their faith with real conviction to friends and coworkers outside the church. But it doesn't have to be this way, and I want to help you grow to where you feel more comfortable and confident sharing your faith. Besides, I've heard those root canals and cavity searches aren't all they're cracked up to be!

If advertising God is a real struggle for you, now is the time to start turning things around. Not tomorrow or next week, but today. It's time to start sharing your God-given talents

and experiences with others so you and the ones you're sharing with can reap the full benefits of an abundant Christ-fulfilled life. As Christians, we have heavenly praise on our lips and in our hearts and we have the greatest of all news to share. Believe me, if you can talk up a good burger, the latest bestseller, a reliable plumber or anything else that generates excitement in your life, you can glorify God.

Your “How-To” Manual for Advertising God

By using the techniques outlined in this book, you'll be able to overcome the obstacles and barriers that both the world and Satan throw your way, and you'll learn how to aggressively advertise God with spirit-filled power, enthusiasm and confidence. The disciple John reminds us in 1 John 2:17 that, “The world and its desires pass away, but the person who does the will of God lives forever.” It's true God wants us to enjoy life and the world we live in, but if you're a slave to worldly pleasures and pursuits at His expense, it's time to redirect your focus and get back to the Christ-directed task of advertising God whenever and wherever you can.

With family, career, church and social responsibilities most of us juggle every day, it's not always easy to stand up and be the one God can count on. In other areas of your life however, you make time for things that are important to you such as volunteering at your child's school, dallying in your hobbies, starting an exercise regimen or coaching your child's baseball team. So be honest with yourself. If God is really that important to you, making excuses for not doing what He wants you to do is really lame on your part, isn't it?

God wants and even instructs us to put Him first in our lives in everything we do from tithing to prayer to reading and studying the Bible to getting involved in church-sponsored events and service projects. Instead of letting complacency and excuses control your life, let your life be ruled by God and revolve around Him. Making God your first priority every minute of every single day will free up time for you to pursue all the opportunities He puts before you. And, I'll bet you still find time to do all those other leisurely activities you enjoy, too! But, if not, serving God is about sacrifice.

As Christians, we are the ones charged with bringing the word and the light of Jesus Christ to the entire world. In advertising lingo, we are the catalysts, the ones promoting the love, fellowship and forgiveness of Christ to everyone we come into contact with as we live out our daily lives. Everything we say and do becomes a primetime commercial aired out daily and targeted towards persuading others to earnestly and enthusiastically accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. Like the old Nike ad slogan, Christ wants us to get out there and “just do it.”

Remember, you are God's light to the world and Jesus instructs you in Matthew 5:16 to “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Believers who are regularly called to advertise God are always on stage so to speak. Whenever you identify yourself as a Christian, there's going to be a brighter light that shines on you, and others will take note of your positive words and actions as well as your negative words and inactions. You have to be careful to always do what is right and Scripturally correct to ensure that you portray yourself and God in the best possible light.

And don't think you just have to advertise God to unbelievers—Christians need to see and hear you advertising God, too. Seeing and hearing you empowers and encourages them and they gain courage and confidence by follow your lead. So what are you waiting for? Get out there and make that light of yours shine!

UP FOR DISCUSSION.

1. What are areas in your life where you could improve on advertising God?
2. Recall a time when advertising God had a positive impact on your life or another's.
3. With your spouse or a friend, engage in role-playing situations to help build your confidence when advertising God.
4. Why do you think advertising God is so difficult for so many faithful Christians?