

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • SEPTEMBER 27, 2020**  
***“WIDE-OPEN SPACES”***

**Song of Focus**  
***“All Things through Christ”***  
**Words and Music by Ed Varnum**

*Refrain:*

You can do all things through Christ who is your strength.  
It's the Holy Spirit, Christ at work in you,  
to do all Jesus did and greater works than these.  
You can do all things through Christ!

1. The Church is the body of Jesus Christ on earth,  
each member of that body equipped with gifts to serve.  
United as one body through which the one God works,  
you can do all things through Christ!

*Refrain:*

You can do all things through Christ who is your strength.  
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to do all Jesus did and greater works than these.  
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2. You are God's people, a priesthood unto God,  
called to serve together, reveal God's love for all,  
that you might declare God's praise, which is our call.  
You can do all things through Christ!

*Refrain:*

You can do all things through Christ who is your strength.  
It's the Holy Spirit, Christ at work in you,  
to do all Jesus did and greater works than these.  
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**The Scripture**  
**John 14:12-14**

*Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.*

# The Message

## *Wide-Open Spaces: Does It Matter WWJD if We Can't Do It?*

### Mark Briley



Apple is always on the edge of things, it seems. One of their ads has stuck with me over time. It says, *“Here’s to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They’re not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can praise them, disagree with them, quote them, disbelieve them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can’t do is ignore them. Because they change things. They invent. They imagine. They heal. They explore. They create. They inspire. They push the human race forward. Maybe they have to be crazy. How else can you stare at an empty canvas and see a work of art? Or sit in silence and hear a song that’s never been written? Or gaze at a red planet and see a laboratory on wheels? We make tools for these kinds of people. Where some people see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.”*<sup>1</sup>

Wow! I read it over several times. And some faces came to mind... people I admire who just jam to a tune in a way that most of us cannot. I thought of people I don't know, who I always wondered about. What makes that guy tick? There was one guy in Tulsa, who stood on the corner of Yale Avenue and 91<sup>st</sup> Street every day for a whole summer. He worked for the mattress store that was in the strip center at that same corner – at least I sure hope he worked for them. His job, best I could tell was to hold a big wooden placard so the traffic at that busy intersection would see what big sale the Mattress Store was having. That guy owned it. He would wear head phones that were clearly jamming some of his favorite tunes, and he would thrash his head of hair to the beat and raise a free hand to the sky with that classic *“Rock on!”* gesture all the while twirling that board like a ninja. Every day. For the summer. In 100+ degree Tulsa summer heat. On my way to work, jamming. On my way home, jamming. He must have lost 40 pounds over the course of the summer. I'd tip my hat to him every time. That guy loved what it did and did it with style. *Here's to you mattress board ninja guy.* That guys gonna do even greater things.

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<sup>1</sup> This advertisement was shared in Jim Palmer's *“Wide Open Spaces: Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity”* which is the inspiration for this series. This message is particularly influenced by Chapter 5: *Divine Autopsy*. Thomas Nelson Publishing. 2007.

Here's to the misfits, the outcasts, the troublemakers. I think of John Lewis – “*Good trouble,*” you know? Game changing life right there. I think of the notorious RBG, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She carved a path, didn't she? “*When I'm sometimes asked when will there be enough women on the Supreme Court and I say, “When there are nine,” people are shocked. But there'd been nine men, and nobody's ever raised a question about that.*” My, she's opened some pathways for humanity. Of our eight, *Good Egg* Freshmen on the hill last Sunday, seven were young women. I thought, “*What great things might they do?*” Here's to RBG who helped pave a way. On our *ZOOM @ Noon* last Monday... open to anyone who wants to drop in for 45-minutes to connect and pray, we talked about the biggest female influencers in our lives – amazing stories told, names lifted. The women of Broadway were named several times, and I thought, “*Awesome.*” Here's to the ones who push the human race forward.

This advertisement from Apple was a nod to Jesus, too... at least it was to me. Talk about a rebel... a troublemaker who saw the world through a different lens than most. And he sought to find the same in those who would follow him. “*Here's to you,*” he'd say, even as he raised a glass at the Last Supper knowing he was at a Table of misfits, rebels, round pegs in square holes, who were going to change the world. Jesus was one, who could peer out into the wide-open spaces ahead of us and imagine how we might grow into such a space. We're more shaped by these sorts of moments than we think. Someone said this week, “*Being a grandpa must be tough, some baby mispronounces a word and suddenly your name is “Peepo” for the last 30 years of your life.*” There are moments like this in our lives that shape everything that happens from that moment forward.

We're inspired by the life of Jesus and the empowerment of all kinds of people, who were touched by him to create a new way for themselves and others. It's powerful to think about how those people change the world. But we don't tend to count ourselves among those who fit into a “*change the world*” category. And it's lofty, right? I mean... “*Come on, preacher.*” I know. I talk myself out of being a world-changer all the time. I can't change the oil in my car. How am I supposed to change the world? Or it's like the laundry. If you've ever opened the dryer and are somewhat relieved that the clothes are still a little damp so you just start the dryer up again instead of having to fold the clothes, you may find changing the world a bit of a lofty goal. Somebody said to me this week, a bit stressed out by the school *ZOOMing* in particular, “*Everything I do is done with the same level of anxiety that a contestant on Chopped has when they're told they have one minute left.*” Don't bother me with changing the world, would you? I'm not in the mood. Okay. Got it.

But... but... what if? What *if* changing the world *is* ours to do? I don't know. It's crazy, right? We're just normal humans living through a pandemic waiting for Dolly Parton's latest Christmas album, “*Have a Holly Dolly Christmas*” to be released. What do you

mean change the world? Jesus said it could be. Our passage from John's Gospel today? Stuff is getting real and fast. The big showdown wasn't far away. How was Jesus going to impart enough confidence in this band of misfits that they could change the world? He flat out told them: John 14:12 ... he didn't quote the Scripture chapter and verse of course... it didn't exist at that point... he just said the words, "*The one who believes in me will not only do what I do but even greater things.*"

"Quit it, Jesus!" they said back. "*Just quit.*" And Jesus said, "*I am unable to quit as I am currently too legit.*" Even greater things? Come on, man. Jesus knew these disciples were made of the same stuff... they had the grit they would need to power through the hard seasons. They didn't have all the answers, but they had the Spirit, and Jesus said, "*The Spirit will guide you in all truth.*" This tells me that we're made of this stuff, too. We're made of the stuff that can change the world... we've just got to clear the stuff that we so readily put up as roadblocks to our own transformation and the transformation of others. Recognizing that we have some ability to help or hinder the transformation of the world is worth our owning.

I had a worship class in seminary that sent me around the city to worship in all different kinds of churches. Pastor Jeffrey Johnson's Eastern Star Baptist Church was one of my most memorable experiences. The service started at 7 o'clock... in the morning! Jesus was barely resurrected by 7 in the morning but... anyway... that's when it was, and so there I was along with several hundred others, a big energized choir and a Hammond B organ to get us fired up when the preacher really got us going. Pastor Johnson told a story about going to get his car washed. It was one of the well-known automatic car washes in town. You pull in, get your tires aligned just so in the little track that moves you through the wash and, "*Voila,*" you get a clean car. On this particular time, however, the line was getting backed up and he was stuck a few cars back from the front of the line with a big train of cars building behind him. After waiting an unusual amount of time, one of the employees came up to Pastor's car. He rolled down his window, and the car-wash employee says, "*Sorry for the delay. There's a car in the middle of the wash whose tire came out of the track and it's currently stuck.*" Pastor said, "*So we're all stuck. Not going anywhere, huh?*" And then, like any good preacher would, Pastor turned it into a spiritual problem. He said, "*You're telling me that someone up ahead of me got off track and is now keeping me from getting clean?*" "*Do you hear me, church?*" And the Hammond B got involved and the crowd went wild as he shouted, "*Do I have a witness in this place?*" And I hollered! I've held onto that for 15 years now. When I get off track. I hinder others from getting clean, too... experiencing transformation... life change. We're intertwined more than we'd like to think. Did you know you have that kind of influence? Somebody is counting on you to stay on track.

And Jesus is trying to remind us... you've got this. You can do all I'm doing and even greater things. This was Jesus saying, "*I go through all the biological stuff you do... I'm*

*hungry, thirsty, tired, subject to pain. I know joy, sorrow, anger, and love. I clocked in at my day job, and liked sleeping in when it was raining. I struggled at family Thanksgivings when Uncle Joey wore his "Make Nazareth Great Again!" hat and Aunt Carol wore her "Build Back Better" t-shirt." Jesus faced the same daily challenges and obstacles we faced, and he saw right through the heart of every excuse, every hesitation, every lack of confidence to say, "Hey... I see you... I see the game changer inside of you. Follow me. You can do this. And you can do something beyond whatever we see as the max right now."*

Eh. I still don't know; do you? We tried wearing those W.W.J.D. – what would Jesus do – bracelets for a while thinking that might be enough. You face a decision, a struggle, a quandary... you look at that bracelet and ask, "Okay... *what would Jesus do?*" and then you did that. But did we? Do we? The answer most always to the WWJD question is "HWLF" – *He would love first*. But what if we can't do what Jesus would do? Does it even matter?

I could have used a little WWJD magic trying to help my youngest with his virtual learning one day this week. I'm working at my computer, and Hayes drops his IPAD on my lap and looks at me wide-eyed with a little shrug like, "You gotta save me here, Dad." Of course, his teacher can see me. "Oh hey, Dad?" So, then it's on. "Hello! Yes?" "Yeah dad," she says, "Need you to look at something here if you could." "Sure!" I said. I tried to focus in on his iPad as she described what she needed me to do... with 40 third-grade eyes watching to see if I could manage or if I'd crash and burn. "Let's do this, Teach." She says, "Just log into Zablezoot, scroll down to the Zarkle app and have your son work on the assignments sent through Kracklezam or check the links posted in Zumblekick." With as confident a look as I could muster, I said, "Let us pray...."

I think this is how we feel when Jesus says, "You can change the world... in even greater ways than me." Whew. It really gets at me, you know. Because I believe Jesus, but there are just some things I **cannot** do. And as a pastor, I dish out this confidence in one moment and the ultimate grace in the other. I'll say, "You can do all things!" but quickly offer grace when someone feels the pressure of falling short: "Hey. We're not Jesus, you know. It's okay." One of my mentors when trying to hire some good help for a position on her team said, "We're trying to hire Jesus, and he's just not available." How do we hold this triumphant spirit of ones, who believe we can change the world even as we hold the grace for the moments, we can't seem to even change our own attitude about change itself?

Maybe it starts with getting our spirit out of the rut we may find ourselves in from time to time. You'll hear someone say on occasion, "Your mind's in a rut," speaking of our inability to get unstuck from a one-track-line of thought. Our spirits get in a similar rut, and we think there's no flipping any script worthy of transformation. But doing the next

right thing? That's where it all begins. And if seemingly small, the compound interest on doing the next right thing over and over again pays big dividends.

I know some of us, and at times, likely all of us, have been intimidated by the wide-open spaces of this season. What's going to happen? What will be left? What will change forever? Wide-open spaces, beyond the confines of comfortable boundaries can bring us anxiety. The Disciples knew a particular world... Jesus was trying to expand their minds, their hearts, their souls... and that wide-open space was a mystery they didn't know if they could handle.

Richard Rohr, in his daily meditations<sup>2</sup>, shared one this week that a Broadway friend passed along. He said, *"All is tearing us apart right now, inside and out, no matter who wins the election or who is on the Supreme Court. We cannot abide in such a place for any length of time, or it will become our prison."* And then he offers this mantra that is worth repeating. He said,

*God cannot abide with us in a place of fear.*

*God cannot abide with us in a place of ill will or hatred.*

*God cannot abide with us inside a nonstop volley of claim and counterclaim.*

*God cannot abide with us in an endless flow of online punditry and analysis.*

*God cannot speak inside of so much angry noise and conscious deceit.*

*God cannot be found when all sides are so far from "the [Ultimate Source]."*

*God cannot be born except in a womb of Love.*

Rohr says if we allow the confining boxes our world is trying to put us in these days, the mess we despise will *"become who we are."* And so, he says, as a spiritual practice these next four months, *"limit how much news you subject yourself to – not more than an hour a day of television, social media, internet news, other commentary or political discussion."* And I know... many of us struggle to turn away from the dramatic, epic crash of each new day. But this obsession will only tear you apart and pull you into the *"dualistic world of opinion and counter-opinion, not Divine Truth, which is always found in a bigger, [more-wide open] space."* Instead, Rohr says, *"Use that time for some form of public service, volunteerism, prayer, or all the above. You have much to gain now and nothing to lose. Nothing at all. And the world—with you as a stable center – has nothing to lose. And everything to gain."*

Jesus says, *"Yes. That's right."* Are you a stable center? Are you grounded in a way that Jesus' *"even greater things"* is part of the view on our horizon? *God cannot abide where there is fear.*

That line stuck with me in a big way this week. A family friend who was just a year behind me at Macon High School buried his only child this week. Dustin's daughter, Destiny, was just nine years old.

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<sup>2</sup> You can sign up to receive Rohr's Daily Meditations at <https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations/>.





Had a one in a million cancer that came like a thief in the night. She was all spunk, and light, and joy, and in a few short months, gone. She was a champ throughout treatment, inspiring thousands upon thousands. Charli D'amelio, of TikTok fame, posted a duet with Destiny that has now been seen more than fifty-five million times. One of the nurses that cared Destiny during her hospitalizations tattooed her name, "*Destiny*" on her arm as an ongoing sign of strength... and to live into God's destiny for her own life. Truly amazing impact she had in her short nine years. She wrote these beautifully penned, handwritten words most days during her treatment. One was entitled, "*It's going to be Okay,*" by Destiny. She starts, "*Hi! I'm Destiny, and today we are going to talk about why you shouldn't worry.*" She shares

a number of points and offers... again at nine years old... "*God does not give you a soul of fear but a spirit of trust... at some point everything has to come to an end. We are children of God, and all will be okay.*" She wrote another entitled, "*Strong.*" "*Hi! I'm Destiny and today we are going to talk about being strong. Some people think it's the type of strong that's like big muscles, abs, and strength. But that's not it. Strong is where you can fight your biggest battles. Strong is where you can be you and not be embarrassed. Strong is not where you never cry. That's not it. Strong is where you can believe, and you do believe.*"

Holding my own nine-year-old at night, praying for his classmate that he never met, we learned something about "*even greater things.*" Another of my old classmates shared a quote with Destiny's daddy this week that holds the hope that no matter the time, no matter the challenge, no matter the box that tries to keep our spirits confined, we are

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YOUR DREAM TO  
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called to rise. The quote said, *"Don't downgrade your dream to match your reality, upgrade your faith to match your destiny."*

This is it, right? *Upgrade your faith*, she says. RBG says, *"Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you."* This is it, right? Jesus says, *"You'll do even greater things."* This is our call, right? Which brings us back to Apple. What did Apple say? *"Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. We make tools for these kinds of people.*

*We see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do."* Even greater things, Jesus? Even greater things.

May it be so. Amen.