

**I Will Not Be
Lukewarm
Rising Above Mediocrity**

A Women's Study Book
By

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Contents

Introduction	Becoming a Zealous, On-Fire Follower of Christ	6
Chapter 1	Surely God Doesn't Expect Me to Do That!	8
Chapter 2	Fanatical, Obsessed, and Overly Zealous	14
Chapter 3	It's All about Me—Or Is It?	20
Chapter 4	Luck Has Nothing to Do with It - Some Thoughts on Relationships	27
Chapter 5	Walk Worthy of Your Vocation	37
Chapter 6	But I Would Have to Clean My House!	46
Chapter 7	You Want Me to Be a Witness?	52
Chapter 8	I'll Have to Admit It—Dealing with Depression	59
Chapter 9	Heaven Is Real, but So Is Hell	66
Chapter 10	Just Going Home	72
Chapter 11	You Have an Appointment	79
Chapter 12	Me? Rob God?	86
Chapter 13	Am I a Lemon?	96
BIBLIOGRAPHY		101

Introduction:

Becoming a Zealous On-Fire Follower of Christ

One of the most sobering statements made in Scripture has to be that found in Revelation 3:15, 16. The Lord is quoted, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.” What a disgusting picture He paints for us. I know of nothing more repulsive than vomit, and yet this is how our Lord describes His reaction to a “lukewarm” Christian.

Just exactly what does God mean when He describes a Christian as lukewarm? What is implied by being cold or hot? And most importantly, which one am I? This is a question I have grappled with for years in my own life. I can’t imagine reaching the gates of heaven only to find that all my years as a Christian have made God sick to His stomach. What does He *REALLY* expect from me?

Bear with me a moment as we look at the true meaning of the words cold, hot, and lukewarm. Understanding what God means when He uses these terms in His word can help us look more honestly at our own lives to see how we measure up.

When we see the word cold, we envision something chilly and indeed that’s the meaning of the Greek word used in this text. When applying that to an individual’s attitude toward God and His word, we would usually think of one who was against, or at the very least did not care or have regard for the things of God, a non-Christian.

The Greek word translated lukewarm here has the meaning of *being* warm and becoming warm. Not cool. God is referring to Christians who are in the Church and are somewhat active. They are warm Christians. I envision them as members who come to services and attend Bible classes. They may even be, to a limited extent, involved in other church programs. They are good people professing Christianity, but they have busy lives full of many other things that *must* be done as well. They are mediocre Christians, average like most of those around them. God says He will vomit them out. Why? What’s lacking? He wants them to be hot!

So, what exactly does the Lord mean when He wishes they were hot? According to **Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, page 565**, the Greek word used in this passage, *zestos*, means boiling hot: not warm, not almost hot, not getting near a boil, but boiling hot! That’s 212 degrees Fahrenheit. Now let’s apply that to someone’s life as a Christian. He wants us to be hot. Not warm, but boiling hot. God wants us to be on fire for Him. He wants fervent and zealous Christians pouring their hearts and lives out for Him because, after all, that’s what He did for us. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...” (John 3:16).

We are surrounded by a world of mediocrity. This is a world of average people with average expectations of themselves and others. The question I would challenge you to ask yourself is, “Will God be satisfied with mediocrity in my life?” This is not a pleasant question, and I have not found it exactly comfortable either as I have contemplated my own life and tried to answer this question. But, as I look at the warning in verse 19 of Revelation 3, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be *ZEALOUS* and repent” (emphasis added). I am compelled to push myself above the average; I am forced to rise above mediocrity if I want to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant” on that final day. I am determined to go to heaven and I Will Not Be *LUKEWARM!*

It is going to take a lot of faith for us, if you will pardon the expression, to “step out of our comfort zones” and not be like everyone else, not be average, not be lukewarm. The Scriptures teach in Romans 10:17 that faith comes from hearing the word of God. When people come to me and ask how they can grow in their faith, I know they think I’m a broken record, or at least severely scratched because I repeatedly tell them they must go to God’s word. That’s where God says faith comes from. We seem to think we can grow in faith in so many other ways and neglect His word which, according to Him, is the source of our faith. Do you want to grow in your faith? Go to His word!

In the lessons that follow, my intention is to look at what God expects from us as Christians, according to His word, and then see how we can recommit ourselves to become the zealous, on-fire followers of Christ, full of faith, that He intended us to be, not only “at church” but in our everyday lives as well. My hope and prayer is that you will honestly reflect on your own life, as I reflect on mine, and choose not to be your average Christian, not to be lukewarm, but to rise above mediocrity.



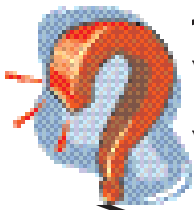
Read Revelation 3:14-22.

Does this church have any good qualities that Jesus lists?

What’s the problem with them?

Define what the Lord meant when He described the three conditions toward God.

1. Cold
2. Lukewarm
3. Hot



Which of the three conditions do you think best describes you at this moment?

Which do you *WANT* to be?

Chapter 1:

Surely God Doesn't Expect Me to Do That?

I have on my bookshelf two books: one is titled *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty* by Manuel J. Smith, PhD and the other is *How to Say No Without Feeling Guilty* by Patti Breitman and Connie Hatch. They are great books and I've read them both. They address the frustrations we all have with obligating ourselves with more than we can handle. They teach how to use that illusive word "NO" and hopefully not offend others while getting ourselves out of a situation we don't want or need to be a part of in the first place. I think sometimes, when we address the things God expects from us, we would like to find a book like one of the above and figure out how to tell Him "No" without feeling guilty. And I don't believe He's going to accept our excuses.

Making Excuses

Remember Moses? He tried that, using excuses. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice..." (4:1). "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (4:10). "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send" (4:13). Do any of those excuses sound like some you've used? God didn't accept them from Moses, and, I fear, won't accept them from us.

"Yeah, but Moses was not your average man," you say. Well, not according to Moses. "Who am I...They will not believe me or listen to my voice...I am not eloquent...I am slow of speech and tongue." Moses thought he was a pretty ordinary guy. But God knew he could do more and *EXPECTED* him to do more.

At the age of eighty, (you did make note of the age) God called Moses to pull up his tent pegs, along with his family, and start all over for the second time in his life. He *EXPECTED* him to go back to Egypt, a land Moses now feared, lead a people he did not want to lead, lead a people who didn't want to be led by him, to a land they didn't want to go to. In so doing, this regular guy became the great deliverer of the Israelite nation. Why? Because God *EXPECTED* him to! God would not allow Moses to be average. God demanded that Moses rise above mediocrity! And he did. Who else was Jesus Christ compared to in the same way? "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me...Him you shall hear" (Deuteronomy 18:15).

When I think of what Moses was called to do and how he responded to God, I often think of a comment my mother said to me just before we uprooted our young family, which included three of her grandchildren, and left the States to move to a tiny Caribbean island where we would spend the next eight years doing mission work. She questioned, "I know someone needs to go, but why my grandchildren?" How her words have echoed in my ears throughout the years—she died four months after we moved. God calls us to do some very difficult things sometimes.

Gideon tried to excuse himself from accomplishing God's plans for him by stating, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest...and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15). Talk about humility! Or was it false humility? Either way, God wasn't impressed. God knew what Gideon could do and He *EXPECTED* him to do it. He didn't accept Gideon wanting to be average.

Gideon was very insecure, as I know we often are today, but God was willing to reassure him over and over that He would be with him. And Gideon went on to be a great military leader and judge of the Israelite nation against their oppressors, the Midianites. God has reassured us over and over that He will be with us. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus shows us how the Father has cared for nature and then reminds us how much more important we are in God's eyes. Will He not care for us? Oh where is our faith? And yet we continue to struggle with finding time to attend worship, talking to others about Christ, attending to the needs of other Christians, etc. After all "I have to support my family and I have to work on Sundays...I'm afraid I will lose my friends if I talk to them about the gospel...If I help that Christian buy groceries this week, I will be a little short... or...you fill in the blank. Oh Christian, where is your faith?"

Jeremiah tried to use an excuse similar to Gideon's. Jeremiah told God he was too young to work for the Lord. Guess what? God didn't buy it. "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you..." (Jeremiah 1:7). Later in verse 17, God's answer to Jeremiah's pretext of being too young was, "Therefore prepare yourself and arise..." and at the end of verse 19 God says, "For I am with you...to deliver you." God told Jeremiah to do something about the inadequacies he felt. Get up and go prepare yourself! God didn't accept Jeremiah's excuse of being average. God demanded that Jeremiah rise above the mediocrity of the world and change himself to be what God wanted him to be.

Young people, your youth is not justification for not working in the kingdom of God. He has work for even you and He *EXPECTS* you to do it. If you feel you are not ready to teach people about the Lord, then "get up and prepare yourself!" That means study and learn God's word—then get busy going wherever He sends you. Change yourself to be what God wants you to be. No more excuses!

Finally, who can forget Jonah? God commanded him to go and cry out against the great city of Nineveh. (I must admit, I wouldn't have wanted his job.) "But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord..." (Jonah 1:3). Do we ever try and run away from the presence of the Lord? Where can we go? How can we hide? Jonah found out that there wasn't anywhere he could go to hide from the Lord. We can't hide from Him. God knows where you are and where you're going and He's already there.

I'm sure when Jonah contemplated the task that God set before him, he thought he would just really rather not go. It was going to be hard work, he was probably going to be made fun of, and besides, it wasn't what he wanted to do anyway. Jonah had other things he would rather be doing, like taking a cruise. Sometimes I think we feel like Jonah felt. Maybe we would just rather not go. After all, it can be hard work to teach others about Christ, and you know there are those who are going to make fun of you. Besides, there are way too many more important things screaming for our attention. There are TV shows to be watched, computer games to be played, football games and movies to be seen, etc., not to mention, we need to plan for our own vacations and cruises. We would just rather not do what God has commanded us to do.

After Jonah's traumatic fish adventure, God once again called him to go and preach to the city of Nineveh. God would not accept Jonah's "You want me to do what? I don't think so!" And let's be honest with ourselves; is He going to accept that from us today? Jonah was just the man for the job—he preached to the massive city of Nineveh and WOW, look at the results. Everyone, from the king to the servant, repented. What preacher do you know today who can get those kinds of results? God knew what Jonah could do and He would accept nothing less. What is it you can do for the Lord? God knows what you can do and He will accept nothing less than your best. The world makes excuses for why they can't do this or that, but God demands that we move beyond being average like the world.

What excuses did Moses make for not going to Egypt?

What excuses did Gideon give for not delivering Israel?

What was Jeremiah's excuse?

Did Jonah give God an excuse?

What did he try and do?



To the Point!

What excuses have you made in the past for not doing something God has commanded you to do?

Tell a time you have let insecurity prevent you from obeying God.

Has there been a time that you have let your age be an excuse for not serving God? If so, when?

Have you ever felt like hiding from God?

Why?

I Will Not Be Moved

There were those in the Bible who refused to be moved by God's urgings to be above average. They did not make excuses—they just flat out refused or set conditions. Barak was told by the prophetess Deborah that God had commanded him to go and deploy troops against Sisera, the commander of a Canaanite king's army. God said, "and I will deliver him into your hand" (Judges 4:6, 7). Barak, however, refused to obey God. He didn't make excuses, he made conditions. Barak said to Deborah, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" (Judges 4:8).

Deborah agreed to go with Barak to battle, but she warned him that the glory of victory wouldn't be his but would go to a woman. In ancient times, the battlefield was a man's world and for a man to die at the hand of a woman was a disgrace (Judges 9:54). Sisera was killed at the hand of a woman named Jael; not on the battlefield, but in her tent as she drove a tent peg through his temple while he slept.

God offered Barak the opportunity to rise up and do something great for God and his nation, but he refused. Once he refused, God found someone else to accomplish His goals. He will do the same today. Jesus said in John 4:35, "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are white for harvest!" But we often refuse to enter into the work God has set before us. Therefore, God will find someone else for His work, but we won't receive the crown of glory that awaits all those who work in His kingdom.

God will not accept us sitting back and letting others do the work or setting the conditions as to how or what we will do. I've never seen a church that's not desperate for Bible class teachers, and yet there are so many who refuse to help in that area. Or they will teach if they can have the exact class they like best each time. It's not because they don't have the knowledge to teach a five-year-old that Jesus loves them. It's because they don't like to teach that age, or it isn't what they want to do. They're refusing to obey God or setting conditions.

How many preachers and ministers will only preach where the conditions are perfect? They prefer a large city with a larger congregation—they would never think of going to a small town and working with a fledgling congregation because it wouldn't do much for their career or it would just be too hard. Besides, having to find and maintain outside support would be such a struggle. And there is no way they would consider preaching outside of this country. Are they refusing to obey God or setting conditions?

And what about you? When opportunities to teach present themselves, have you prepared yourself and do you accept them, or do you refuse because it's not what you want to do? Do you look for opportunities to go to other places to help in the work of the Lord, or do you refuse to go or go only if you can set your own perfect conditions under which you would be comfortable? When you see needs around you, do you refuse to help or define the conditions under which you would consider helping? If so, then you too are refusing to obey God and setting conditions.

Despising the Things of God

There's one character in Scripture whose attitude toward the things of God is perhaps even more disturbing than that of Barak's. His name is Esau. You remember that Esau was older than his twin brother Jacob. After having been out hunting in the field one day, Esau came home to find his brother cooking a pot of stew, a pot of beans. Esau asked his brother for a bowl, and Jacob offered to sell him a bowl in exchange for his birthright. Esau nonchalantly says, "Well, why not, I'm about to die anyway. What's this birthright to me?" (dgb paraphrase) He trades his birthright for the bowl of lentils and goes on his merry way. The Bible says he "despised" his birthright (Genesis 25:34).

So what exactly does it mean when it says he "despised" his birthright? The birthright guaranteed

the eldest son a double portion of the inheritance from his father, but it also included that he would be head or chieftain over the family. And maybe even more significantly here, it included the spiritual blessings and covenant relationship with God. Esau and Jacob were both aware of the blessings and privileges that went along with this birthright. To Esau though, they were meaningless and unimportant. All he could think of was the here and now and the fact that he was hungry. Hebrews 12:16 calls Esau a profane person and warns us to not be like him. The word translated “profane” here has the idea of one who cares nothing for that which is sacred or holy. **Vine’s Expository Dictionary, page 889** defines it as “that which lacks all relationship or affinity to God.” Thus, Esau put little or no importance in the things of God.

Are we guilty of despising the things of God? Are we profane people? When it’s more important for us to make sure we get our supper than it is for us to attend a Wednesday night Bible class, or we need to leave early so we can get the kids to bed (after all they need that extra fifteen minutes of sleep), then aren’t we putting more importance on the physical than the spiritual? Aren’t we being profane? When we allow our children to put school work above worship and Bible study, aren’t we teaching them to be like Esau? What are we teaching them when we can’t find the time to take food to the sick, visit a shut-in or even send a card because we’re so busy running them back and forth from ball practice, piano lessons, and school activities? Hasn’t the physical become more important than the spiritual? When we choose to entertain our out of town guests rather than assemble with the saints, which have we told God is more important to us?

The Hebrew writer continues in 12:17, “For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” What a sobering warning to us. There comes a point that it’s too late to inherit the blessings from God, though we may seek it diligently with tears. I have had many a parent come to me in tears, regretting the way they neglected the things of God when raising their families and now it’s too late to teach “Johnny and Suzie” how important the things of God are.

God has expectations for each of us. He demands the very best from us. My intent for this book is to wake us up and help us see that we serve a glorious God who wants us to be all that we can be and challenges us to not be like everybody else. Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13). Most of the world will take the path of least resistance, the “broad way,” because it’s easy. But we are called to go on the narrow path. It may be a little more difficult and demand a little more from us, but God will be creating in us beautiful lives that will begin to resemble the one found in His Son, Jesus Christ.

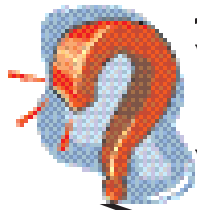
God will take me “just as I am,” but He then *EXPECTS* me to become a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). So, does God want me to push myself beyond the ordinary and does He demand I rise above mediocrity? Surely God doesn’t expect me to do that? Oh Yes, He does!

What did Barak say about obeying God?

How did God respond to Barak’s conditions?

Did Esau repent of his sinful attitudes toward God?

If you answered yes, did he have any consequences to suffer after he repented?
What were they?



What does it mean to despise something?

What does profane mean?



To The Point!

Write a time that you have set conditions for how or when you would do something for the Lord.

Do you feel you were justified in setting those conditions?

What would you do differently today?

Think of a time you have been profane in your actions or have shown that you despised the things of God.

What can, and hopefully, will you do to change any profane behavior that you have?

What does God *EXPECT* from Christians?

Does God expect *YOU* to be above average in relation to the world?

If yes, what steps will you take, starting today, to rise above mediocrity?