

Faith and Action

By Brian McLaren.

[Dear friends – a group of friends is working on a website that will allow people to contribute ideas on putting the message of *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* into action. This is a preview of the starter content – to which we hope you will contribute when the interactive site is up. Thanks for your interest!]

Introduction:

Theologian George Hunsberger said, “Proclaiming a gospel about Christ that is not shaped by the gospel Jesus preached distorts the gospel by proclaiming only part of its meaning” (in Darrel Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, Eerdmans, 1988, p. 88). The gospel Jesus preached, as I explore in *The Secret Message of Jesus*, is the revolutionary message of the kingdom of God. And as I explain in *Everything Must Change*, our most radical challenge is simply to believe that message – over and against the dominant framing stories and values massaged and driven into us by the suicidal societal machinery of our day.

As *Everything Must Change* makes clear, our suicidal societal machinery works through a clever, covert curriculum. Through everything from political speeches to children’s stories, from box-office-blockbusters to advertising jingles, from grade school curricula to values learned in some sports and video games, from dirty jokes that elicit an embarrassed grin to patriotic songs that elicit a reverent tear, from so-called objective news reporting to religious broadcasting, our societal machinery teaches and forms, forms and teaches, through a kind of subtle subliminal seduction. Followers of Jesus must, in this light, teach people to expose and reject the covert

curriculum wherever it appears, and replace it with an overt curriculum, “teaching people to practice everything [Jesus commanded],” as Matthew 28:18-20 puts it.

So, one of the many powerful ways faith communities can subvert the suicide machine is through this essential work of helping people become life-long learners (or disciples) who are becoming savvy to the covert curriculum and who actively and joyfully learn to live in freedom from it. Sadly, many of our faith communities have lost this focus, replacing the kind of radical discipleship that is so desperately needed with a more institutional or privatized religiosity which forms people into – not disciples of Jesus – but “fans” of Jesus. This domesticated faith renders people unwitting drones in our suicidal societal machinery (to use Paul’s term, people who are “conformed to this world”). They fall prey to what Dallas Willard calls “the great omission” from “the great commission”: they seek to be adherents to the Christian religion, believers in certain doctrines, consumers of religious products and services, and attenders of religious meetings without being radical disciples of Jesus in their daily lives.

This kind of religious life may cause a great commotion, but will produce little transformation, personal or social. Neither these people nor their faith communities pose a serious threat to the status quo dominated by our societal machinery and its framing stories, because whatever knowledge they accumulate or emotion they generate, they don’t withdraw their confidence from the suicide machine and translate their faith in Jesus’ kingdom-of-God narrative into action.

People who want forward motion, not just religious commotion, always find ways to put knowledge and emotion into action. They do so through practices. Practices are small actions

within our power that exercise us so that we can gradually do things beyond our current power. In this way, practicing the faith is akin to practicing the piano or karate or medicine: one learns to do big things through the disciplined practice of small things. (Spiritual practice will be the theme of my next book, *Finding Our Way Again* [Nashville: Nelson, 2008].)

The following list – far from complete – is offered to stimulate you to practice living by the radical message of Jesus. It's arranged (in some cases, somewhat arbitrarily) under the categories of the societal machinery described in *Everything Must Change*. If you take it as a “to do” list, with the idea that you have to begin doing all these things at once, it will be overwhelming and completely counterproductive, but if you choose a few items at a time to work on as practices, as ways of living out your faith in action, then I believe you'll find plenty here to help you make a difference. Don't look at these practices as things you *have to do*, but as things you *get to try*, experiments you can begin ... and then see what happens.

The adventure will be even more effective if you launch out with a group of friends – since being disciples is a team activity. Perhaps you can divide up the items below and invite members of your group to research various ones and present their findings. You may all decide to practice some of the items together, or you may each choose different items – and then share your experiences so group learning can take place.

And this is so important: this list is just a beginning! Thankfully, there are so many initiatives springing up around the world as part of this revolution of hope. So please, if you are involved with an organization, resource, or practice that you believe will help others participating in this

revolution of hope, please add your resource as a comment to the postings below. With your help, this could become an increasingly important resource to interested, visionary, emerging activists around the world.

### **Prosperity Crisis:**

We find ourselves in a prosperity system that is currently incapable of living within environmental limits. It withdraws more resources and injects more wastes than the planet can provide or absorb. We need to find practices that help us create wise, sane, and sustainable prosperity, not suicidal prosperity.

\_\_\_Buy ethically: Learn the story of something you buy regularly – shirts, tomatoes, cherries, cheese, shoes, books, coffee, beef, coal, oil, furniture, whatever. Be a detective and ask questions like these: Where was the item produced? How? By whom? What were the effects on the local environment and economy? How was it transported to the store where you purchased it? What will happen to it after you are finished with it? How much of it can be recycled? Learn about “fair trade,” and simultaneously avoid unethical products and businesses and support ethical ones. Check out [tradeasone.org](http://tradeasone.org) and other ethical buying sites.

\_\_\_Eat ethically: Read Jane Goodall’s *Harvest of Hope*, or try “a year of eating locally” (or maybe a month), inspired by Bill McKibbin’s *Deep Economy*.

\_\_\_Work ethically. Learn about sustainability and the triple bottom line, and organize a meeting with your management or owners to consider transforming your company into a sustainable one. (Check out [solsustainability.org](http://solsustainability.org)).

\_\_\_Invest ethically. Invest in companies practicing sustainability and the triple bottom line, and use your stockholder influence to move companies in that direction. (link to ethical investing sites)

\_\_\_Encourage social entrepreneurs. Learn about microenterprise and support organizations that promote economic development among the poor.

\_\_\_Learn your environmental address. Your political address is a country and state. Your postal address is a street and zip code. Your environmental address is a watershed. After you discover your environmental address, learn about the health of your watershed and find ways to protect and heal it. Learn about your state's endangered plant and animal species, and consult your state's department of natural resources to learn about other environmental issues. (Begin with [water.usgs.gov/wsc/findwatershed.html](http://water.usgs.gov/wsc/findwatershed.html).)

\_\_\_Support Creative Artists. Withdraw support from destructive musicians, film-makers, architects, visual artists, and other artists whose message and work contributes to the suicide machine's harmful framing stories and promotes its covert curriculum. In their place, support artists who expose and counter the suicide machine's covert curriculum. Especially encourage local and indigenous artists rather than limiting yourself to the "big stars" of the dominant entertainment industry.

\_\_\_Reduce your environmental footprint. Learn about your environmental footprint through [zerofootprint.net](http://zerofootprint.net) and [myfootprint.org](http://myfootprint.org), and reduce it. After you've begun this process in your own life, invite your company and church to do the same.

\_\_\_Consider a new career or calling. If you're in high school or college, pursue a career that works for the common good rather than simply pursuing personal profit. If your line of work contributes to the suicide machine, find alternate employment, or find ways to change your

workplace to be in greater alignment with the way of Jesus. If you are retired, consider a second career (paid or volunteer) that dismantles the suicide machine and contributes to a transformed world.

\_\_\_Speak Up: Voice appropriate approval and disapproval in conversations, in letters to the editor, on call-in shows, and on websites. Don't insult or condemn: simply voice your beliefs, hopes, concerns, and understandings – and then listen respectfully and respond appropriately to the replies of others. Withdraw your consent from people and organizations who promote the suicide machine.

\_\_\_Ask Questions: Ask politicians what kind of leadership they are going to offer on the prosperity/planetary crisis. Check out <http://blog.beliefnet.com/godspolitics/2007/09/the-leadership-gap-on-global-w.html> and [stepitup07.org](http://stepitup07.org), for ideas on how to do so.

\_\_\_Encourage Those Who Speak Up: Encourage and support journalists, writers, radio personalities, artists, preachers, and others who speak up. One such group is “Red Letter Christians” – hosted by [sojo.net](http://sojo.net).

\_\_\_Determine a personal maximum income, or implement a graduated tithe: If unlimited prosperity is indeed a problem, you can choose a personal maximum income (say, three or five or ten times the national average income), above which you will give income away to good causes on a monthly or annual basis. Or commit yourself to a “graduated tithe,” where you give 10% of your income up to your local or national average income; then increase your giving by 5% (or some pre-determined amount) for every 25% increase in income. See for example [urbana.org/pdf/feat\\_money\\_graduatedtithe.pdf](http://urbana.org/pdf/feat_money_graduatedtithe.pdf).

\_\_\_Vacation Ethically: Explore and practice ecotourism (tourism that is sensitive to the environment) and social tourism (where you learn about other societies and cultures through

travel, and seek to serve during and after your travel experience). Many so-called mission trips are actually forms of social tourism.

\_\_\_Practice Neighborliness: Read the story of Ruth in the Bible, and seek to be like Boaz by “adopting” one poor person or family into your own family. For example, help a poor teenager go to college, or visit a sick person in the hospital. Organizations like World Vision, World Relief, Compassion International, various mission agencies, and local churches can help you.

(list sites)

\_\_\_Vote for The Common Good: Don’t simply vote for your personal self-interest; vote for the good of the poor, minorities, and your enemies too. Also, remember that birds, streams, frogs, elephants, and the wind can’t vote: use your vote in their behalf. Study one animal or plant that is endangered in your area – or elsewhere – and become its advocate in some practical ways. (link to sojourners, one campaign’s one vote, )

\_\_\_Connect with Creation. Plant a garden. Put up a birdfeeder and birdhouse. Improve your property as a habitat for local species of animals and plants, especially those under threat by human interference. Support groups that care for creation.

\_\_\_Pick a species. Choose a species of plant or animal that is endangered, and become its champion.

\_\_\_Expose the Covert Curriculum: When you discover the covert curriculum of the suicide machine at work – whether in the media, in education, in a church or religious body, or elsewhere, try to make the covert message covert and encourage thoughtful and respectful dialogue about it.

## **Equity Crisis:**

The gap between rich and poor is growing wider and wider, and doing so faster and faster. The good news of Jesus calls disciples to defect from a self-centered agenda of never having enough, and instead invites us to invest our energy for the benefit of the poor, the excluded, the disadvantaged, the “last, the least, and the lost.” We need to discover and follow practices that bring equity to all God’s children everywhere.

\_\_\_Run for Public Office: Politics is not the only or most important way of bringing about societal transformation, but it is an important way. If you believe you can be an agent of transformation, prepare yourself for this important calling. If you know someone who you believe would be an ethical office-holder, encourage them to run.

\_\_\_Ask politicians the right questions: Remember that most political systems are already captive to the suicide machine, so they won’t generate the needed questions. In fact, they’ll often generate “red-herring” questions that distract you from the questions that really need to be asked.

\_\_\_Build non-utilitarian relationships with people of other races, religions, political parties, etc. By knowing people who are different from yourself, you can expand your circle of concern for the common good.

\_\_\_Learn your social history. Just as you have an environmental address, you have a location in social history. Learn about colonization and its effects on the Indigenous Peoples of your nation and region. Learn about slavery in your national and regional history. Seek to understand the struggle for equity in your nation and region through the centuries, and in the present.

\_\_\_Recommend Books and Other Resources: Whenever you find resources that promote a concern for equity, promote them.

\_\_\_Change your political language. Since the suicide machine is often strengthened through paralyzing polarizations, find ways to transcend polarized dialogue and ask people what they mean by terms like “liberal” or “conservative,” “left” or “right.” And try to avoid these terms altogether when possible.

\_\_\_Challenge your party: Instead of comparing your political party’s strengths to other parties’ weaknesses, compare your party’s weaknesses to Jesus’ message of the kingdom. Challenge your party to move in the direction of holistic justice.

\_\_\_Join constructive social movements. Find movements that seek to dismantle injustice and transform the suicide machine into an equitable global community.

\_\_\_Demonstrate, organize, and participate in civil disobedience. Where injustice is tolerated, discover the power of nonviolent action.

\_\_\_Always include surprising people in your parties – invite a poor person, a homeless person, a person from another religion or culture, etc., following example of Jesus.

\_\_\_Let someone off the hook. Show mercy to them. Give them a break, and tell them why you’re doing so.

\_\_\_Overpay a laborer or seller if you believe they have undercharged you. Show a generous kind of equity that surpasses mere “fairness.” Get more pleasure out of being generous than of getting bargains.

\_\_\_Join or affiliate with a New Monastic Community, a Catholic Worker Community, or another group that lives a radical witness to the equity God dreams of and desires.

### **Security Crisis:**

As we use up our environmental margin and experience environmental stress, and as the gap between rich and poor grows wider, existing tensions between people and groups of people are intensified. The poor resort to crime, mass migration, war, and terrorism; the rich invest more and more money and energy in border control, war, anti-terrorism and spying, weapons, and preemptive war, together increasing the likelihood of catastrophic violence.

\_\_\_ Discover and follow less-filtered news. Realize that many of our news media are already domesticated by the suicide machine. Learn the other side of issues.

\_\_\_ Respect authorities, but doubt power. Practice speaking with honor for leaders, but don't be afraid to speak the truth to or about powerful interests.

\_\_\_ Resist the *warrior trance*. Notice and name when people use warfare language and seek to motivate by fear and increase us/them-friend/enemy thinking. Fear their fear more than you fear what they're afraid of.

\_\_\_ Don't vilify. Try to see and portray those whom you think are wrong as victims of larger systems of deception and injustice. Speak of them in ways that you would not be ashamed if they were present. Imagine winning them over as friends and allies through your kindness and openness, since it is unlikely you will win them over by insult and argument.

\_\_\_ Learn about people who are considered "bad guys" or enemies. Seek to humanize enemies in your thinking and in your words by making personal contact with them, reading books by them, enjoying their art and culture, etc.

\_\_\_ Visit enemies. Consider joining or supporting groups like the Christian Peacemaker Teams or Witnesses for Peace.

\_\_\_Celebrate new heroes. For every war hero, find a peace hero. For every successful business leader, find a hero who helps the poor. For every politician or journalist who uses warrior rhetoric, find others who use wise and charitable communication.

\_\_\_Look for the covert security curriculum in political speeches, movies, etc.

\_\_\_Refuse to support wars you would not send your daughter or son to die in.

\_\_\_Refuse to support wars you would not send your daughter or son to kill for.

\_\_\_Refuse to support wars.

\_\_\_Respect the sincere people who work in the military, but vote against the expansion of military budgets whenever possible, and realize that a big military is a major facet of “big government.”

\_\_\_Raise your children to be children of peace – Be suspicious of video games that cheapen life and minimize violence. Talk about the news with your children. Encourage them to write school reports on peacemakers.

\_\_\_Vote all your values. Consult groups like [sojo.net](http://sojo.net) to learn about a wide range of candidates' values.

\_\_\_Form a “peace group” to support peacemaking efforts around the world. Learn about the world's leading peacemakers in each place of conflict. Pray for them. Write to them. Join them.

\_\_\_Travel and learn “why people hate America.” Don't respond defensively, but sincerely try to see your nation as others see it.

\_\_\_Promote books and movies which do not glorify war. Expose and speak against ones that do.

\_\_\_Wage peace. Wherever there is conflict – religious, political, social, global – determine not which side you can help win, but how you can help both sides win what should be won.

## **Spirituality Crisis:**

Our world's religions too seldom provide us with a framing story of true peace, wise prosperity, and common-good equity. Instead, they provide religious justification for suicidal framing stories of revenge, fear, domination, isolation, or theocapitalism and theocommunion. We need practices that help us discover, celebrate, live, and proclaim the gospel of God proclaimed and demonstrated by Jesus: the good news of the kingdom of God.

\_\_\_ Believe Jesus' narrative of the coming kingdom of God. Read and reread the gospels and seek to understand Jesus' message. Check out my book *The Secret Message of Jesus*, or related books like Chalke and Mann's *The Lost Message of Jesus*, Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, or Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

\_\_\_ Preach, teach, and gossip the good news of the kingdom of God. Start book groups and in other ways spread the message.

\_\_\_ Ask religious leaders the right questions. Avoid fruitless arguments.

\_\_\_ Discover (or rediscover) mission trips as field trips – for your learning and to develop authentic relationships, not just to “fix” other people.

\_\_\_ Join or befriend the New Monasticism and other groups living a radical witness of the kingdom of God. Learn about how they live, what they do, and why; financially support them and worship with them if possible.

\_\_\_ Promote integral mission. Learn where it originated and why.

\_\_\_ Infuse your church's liturgy with concerns for justice, peace, and creation care.

\_\_\_ Drop out of movements, churches, denominations, or other organizations that support empire – and politely explain why. Join their counterparts that focus on Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God.

\_\_\_ Discourage religious imperialism or Christian supremacy and their counterparts in other religions.

\_\_\_ Change your theological language to reflect your changing values and insights.

\_\_\_ Speak up. Disagree gently by testifying personally, perhaps saying, “I see things differently.” (Don’t say, “You’re wrong.”) Tell people you are coming to see things in a new way, without pressuring them to agree with you and without needing to defend your new way.

\_\_\_ Be the revolution. Don’t just complain or talk. Live into a new world through small but meaningful choices.

\_\_\_ Don’t be a pain. Don’t nag people or become a party pooper. The kingdom of God is, among other things, joy. So lighten up and have fun whenever you can.

\_\_\_ Focus on young people. Assume that a lot of older people won’t change (and maybe you’ll be pleasantly surprised). Believe that young people can and should change, and encourage them to do so. Be an influence on a 5 or 11 or 15 year old.

\_\_\_ Read the Bible in new ways. Look for themes of prosperity, equity, and security. Ask yourself why you didn’t see them before. Help others see them. Talk about the Bible more than ever.

\_\_\_ Watch for the covert curriculum in sermons, religious books, religious broadcasting, etc. Speak up about it and express – gently and kindly – your discomfort. Don’t expect anyone to agree, but do “give a witness” for justice, peace, and creation care.

\_\_\_ Don’t wait for permission or sanction ... start now.

\_\_\_Project – throw yourself into something – a cause, an online discussion group on a relevant issue, a mission project. Reject – throw away something or stop doing something that distracts you from more important things.

\_\_\_Do Bible studies that focus on justice, creation care, and peace.

\_\_\_Throw parties and celebrations to mark advances in justice and peace and sustainability, because the kingdom of God is justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

\_\_\_Sing about justice concerns in your worship services. Check out Brian McLaren’s “Songs for a Revolution of Hope” (<http://www.restorationvillage.com/SFRH/index.php>). See also songs by Steve Bell ([signpostvillage.com](http://signpostvillage.com)) and Ken Medema ([kenmedema.com](http://kenmedema.com)), the Iona Community ([iona.org.uk](http://iona.org.uk)) and others. Spread the word about worship music that reflects integral mission.

Links:

Please add links with brief introductions for relevant organizations under each heading below.

Prosperity: Organizations that are working for sustainability (environmental, social, and spiritual) to address the prosperity crisis.

Equity: Organizations that are working to help the poor and equitably decrease the gap between the poor and the rich to address the poverty crisis.

Security: Organizations that are waging peace and seeking to build reconciliation to address the peace crisis.

Spirituality: Organizations that are seeking to draw people toward the good news of God’s sacred ecosystem, God’s divine peace insurgency, God’s unterror movement, and God’s divine love economy (aka the kingdom of God).