

“I am happy to say that Chris Morphew’s *Worth It* is worth it—worth some close reading, worth sharing with a teenager, worth time spent meditating on and talking about the truths he shares. Morphew has a knack for opening the Scripture with straightforward and biblically faithful warmth, engaging rather than patronizing the teenage reader. He does not shy away from hard truths about God’s word or about our world. The happy result is a theological resource for teenagers that they (and the adults who love them) can trust.”

**ANNA MEADE HARRIS**, Senior Director of Content, Rooted Ministry; Author, *God’s Grace for Every Family*

“Mix together some psychology, science, culture and a whole bunch of gospel, and you’ve got *Worth It*. This practical book goes back to the basics of God’s story of love and justice, showing how you can live as a Christian today. This isn’t just theory. This is real.”

**DAVE CORNES**, Writer and Presenter, *Vox* (from Christianity Explored); Church Planter, Isle of Wight, UK

“Going against the current of culture can be hard, confusing, and discouraging for followers of Jesus at any age. In his new book, author and teacher Chris Morphew invites teens to honestly face their questions, doubts, and difficulties. And like an experienced coach, he encourages young Christians to keep struggling. He shows that following Jesus is not only reasonable but desirable. The culmination of decades of teaching teens, this short book paints a clear vision of Christianity that’s not only true but good—and absolutely *Worth It*.”

**CHAMP THORNTON**, Acquisitions Editor, Crossway; Author, *The Radical Book for Kids*

“When childhood faith tumbles into the teen years, troubling thoughts and tough questions can loom large. What we believed as kids can be challenged by feelings, friendships and a big world of countless ideas and experiences. Reading *Worth It* felt to me like spending time with a wise friend. Chris is someone who clearly looks and listens well, who knows God’s word, who has taken time to think deeply and share honestly about what it means to follow Jesus as a teen. I look back on special books that the Lord brought into my life at just the right time. I expect that for many young people who are thinking through their Christian faith, *Worth It* is a book that has come along at just the right time.”

**COLIN BUCHANAN**, Singer/Songwriter

“Jesus promised to give us the fullest life possible. But how can we trust Jesus? What does living with Jesus even look like? Chris Morpew’s *Worth It* is concise, easy-to-read, and yet comprehensive. There’s a lot here to encourage and equip us to live our best lives in Jesus.”

**SAM CHAN**, Head Trainer and Mentor, EvQ School of Evangelism, City Bible Forum; Author, *How to Talk About Jesus (Without Becoming THAT Guy)*

“This is a brilliant book! Not only does Chris Morpew deeply understand the complex issues teenagers face today but he knows and cherishes Scripture, and shows with clarity how Jesus meets our deepest needs. He writes in a way that is engaging, honest and easy to follow. I loved reading this. For everyone who wants to grasp why and how to follow Jesus in a post-Christian culture, I enthusiastically recommend this book.”

**DEREK BROTHERRSON**, Principal,  
Sydney Missionary and Bible College

# Worth It

**Chris  
Morphew**



the good book  
COMPANY

## *For Caely*

Worth It: Following Jesus When Life Feels Complicated

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## CHAPTER 1

# Life to the Full

*“I have come that they may have life,  
and have it to the full.”  
—Jesus of Nazareth*

**“**It just feels overwhelming, you know?”

He sat slumped at the bottom of the little plastic slide usually reserved for our church’s preschoolers, eyes down on his feet. All around him, the rest of the youth group stood chatting and eating ice cream and dropping in and out of the impromptu volleyball game someone had started—but Ethan had other things on his mind. For the last 20 minutes, he’d been giving me the latest in a series of updates on his life and school and parents and everything else that was weighing on him.<sup>1</sup>

He’d been coming along to youth group for a few years now and, somewhere along the way, he’d decided

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1 Full disclosure: I’ve changed some of the details here to keep this particular young person anonymous—but the truth is, it’s just one of so many similar stories I could tell you.

that Jesus really was who he said he was. And while becoming a follower of Jesus had made an incredible, positive difference in Ethan's life, it had also created a whole bunch of new complications and challenges.

His parents weren't exactly *against* his faith, but they didn't really get it either. ("My dad calls youth group 'the cult'—which is a joke, obviously, but it still shows you what he thinks about it.")

School was worse. Ethan's mostly atheist friends swung back and forth between honest confusion and outright derision. ("They actually *do* think I've joined a cult.") And when it came to his LGBTQIA+ friends, things were even more complicated. They didn't just feel confused; they felt *betrayed*. How could Ethan join a religion full of bigots and homophobes?

Despite all that, Ethan remained fiercely committed to his friends. But there were times when that commitment felt like way too much to carry on his own—not so much because of what they thought of his faith but because of all the *other* stuff his friends were going through.

Over the past several months, I'd started to get a sense of the main characters in Ethan's school life. One friend's parents were going through a messy divorce. Another friend was struggling with depression and anxiety. Another had what sounded uncomfortably like an eating disorder but was refusing to talk to anyone about it. Another friend, biologically female, had recently started going by he/they pronouns and was



currently at war with their parents, who'd been hesitant to embrace the change.

“And I just—” Ethan started, and then broke off, rubbing his eyes. “I’m doing the best I can, but I still don’t... I just feel like I never know what to say. Like, I’m not a counsellor, you know? They have all these questions and I just don’t really know how to answer them.”

Meanwhile, he still had plenty of questions of his own. Questions about life and faith and God and how all those pieces were meant to fit together.

In his search for answers, he'd started reading the Bible for himself—but, to him at least, that only seemed to make things worse. He'd started running into all kinds of confusing references to violence and slavery and the mistreatment of women. In some places, God seemed as generous and kind and loving and welcoming as he'd always thought—but a few pages later, it often seemed like a different story.

So what was my friend meant to do with all that?

The whole reason we were sitting here, having this conversation, was that somewhere along the way he'd caught a glimpse of the life that Jesus held out to him, and it had seemed like the most beautiful, most compelling news in the whole world. But had that all just been a blip? A momentary delusion? In the middle of all the complexity and challenge of real life, could he

actually trust that “the good news about Jesus”<sup>2</sup> really was as good as it had first seemed?

The same question goes for us. Can we?

## **Living in strange days**

It’s a pretty rough time to be a young person.

Actually, I guess it’s just a pretty rough time to be a person in general.

And, look, I know people will say that’s always been true—that every generation has had its challenges, that being human has pretty much *always* been hard—but still, any way you look at it, we’re living in incredibly challenging, complex times.

For one thing, we’ve never had more options for wiping ourselves off the face of the earth, whether it’s through nuclear war, climate catastrophe, cyberterrorism, the rise of artificial intelligence, or the next global pandemic. As one scientist put it, “The planet will survive; the question is, will we?”<sup>3</sup>

And while technology has brought humanity closer together than ever before, opening up the possibility for us to all work together to face these challenges, let’s be honest—that’s not exactly what we see most of the time.

Older generations—Millennials and Gen X—grew up with the idea that *progress* was just a thing our species

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2 Mark 1:1

3 Katharine Hayhoe, *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist’s Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World* (Atria/One Signal Publishers, 2021), p. 65.

was inevitably going to keep on achieving. They were raised on these shining ideals of a future where science, technology and education were going to solve all the world's problems and usher in a wondrous new era of peace, justice and harmony. Not that there wouldn't be challenges along the way, but most people just kind of assumed things were inevitably going to keep getting better.

But if you're a young person today, my guess is that this is not how you see things—because *you've* arrived on the planet just in time to see so many of those bright, sparkly promises crashing and burning in front of you.

You've seen how the same technology that's connected us all more closely together is also being used to push us further apart.

You've seen politics get more and more polarised, to the point where it feels like all anyone knows how to do anymore is yell at each other.

You've seen people at war with each other online—and in the streets—over issues of race, religion, gender, sexuality, climate, the treatment of refugees, and on and on. And you've seen *literal* wars break out across the world, with the very real potential to spill over into even broader, more devastating conflicts.

In almost every area of life, from politics to professional sport to Hollywood to the church, you've seen trusted institutions and beloved public figures exposed as violent, abusive and corrupt.

And, turning up the dials on all of this stuff, you've grown up in a world where the internet—and with it, most of the news and opinions we're exposed to—has become dominated by more and more sophisticated algorithms, designed not to expand our horizons, or expose us to new perspectives, or even point us to the truth but to keep us glued to our screens by any means necessary.

Which, it turns out, often means keeping us angry. As journalist Johann Hari explains, “On average, we will stare at something negative and outrageous for a lot longer than we will stare at something positive and calm ... So an algorithm that prioritises keeping you glued to the screen will—unintentionally but inevitably—prioritise outraging and angering you. If it's more enraging, it's more engaging.”<sup>4</sup>

Throw in the rise of artificial intelligence, and it's getting harder and harder to know not just *what's* real but even *who's* real online. Is it any wonder that it feels impossible to have meaningful conversations about the things we disagree on?

And in the mix of all that, you've seen—and likely felt—the impact of some truly disturbing mental health trends in recent years. Psychology professor Jean M. Twenge puts it starkly: “Every indicator of mental health and psychological well-being has become more negative among teens and young adults since 2012.”<sup>5</sup>

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4 Johann Hari, *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), p. 125-126.

5 Jean M. Twenge, *Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z,*

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation has recently identified loneliness as a “global public health concern” with the potential to spiral into a worldwide epidemic.<sup>6</sup> In one recent study, more than 1 million teenagers in 37 countries were asked if they agreed with statements like “I feel lonely at school” and “I feel awkward and out of place at my school”—and in 36 out of 37 countries, the results showed an increase in school loneliness over the past decade.<sup>7</sup>

I could keep going, but I think you get it.

### **Is Jesus worth it?**

Meanwhile, if you’re someone who’s trying to follow Jesus in the middle of all this—or if you’re at least seriously considering it—that carries a whole other set of challenges.

Plenty of people see Christianity as outdated at best and bigoted or dangerous at worst—not just unhelpful in the face of all this complexity but actively contributing to the problem. Being a follower of Jesus can make you feel out of step with your friends and family, and with society in general.

All of which might leave you wondering, *Is following Jesus really worth it?*

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*Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America’s Future* (Atria Books, 2023), p. 392.

6 Sarah Do Couto, “Global News: Loneliness is now a ‘global public health concern,’ says WHO”, <https://globalnews.ca/news/10095898/loneliness-global-public-health-concern-who/> (accessed 12 Dec. 2023).

7 Twenge, *Generations*, p. 405-406.

Is the good news about Jesus good enough to be worth all the hassle that comes with it?

Is Jesus' teaching still relevant 2,000 years on?

Jesus said he had come to bring abundant life: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."<sup>8</sup> Is that a promise you can actually count on him to follow through on?

Can following Jesus *really* make a positive difference in your life?

I've spent years wrestling through these same questions myself—and what I've come to believe is that, in the end, all those questions are really just different ways of asking the same question:

*Can I trust him?*

And so that's the question I want to spend the rest of this book exploring.

First, I want to show you why I'm convinced that, no matter how good you already think the good news of Jesus is, it's *better*—that the story the Bible tells about God and humanity really is the most breathtakingly beautiful, life-giving, and *true* way to understand the universe and your place in it.

Then we'll explore what it looks like to fully lean into this story—to move beyond knowing *about* Jesus towards actually *knowing* Jesus for yourself. We'll consider what it means to experience his love and care

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8 John 10:10

and faithfulness not just as ideas but as the heartbeat of your everyday life.

Finally, we'll pull all that together and start figuring out how you can let your relationship with Jesus transform your relationships with everyone else—and how, as you stick with him, he'll help you navigate the challenges of our uncertain world in a way that nothing and no one else can.

But before we get into any of that, we need to go right back to the beginning and talk about the only thing that's going to make any of the rest of this make sense.

We need to talk about the most important discovery that any of us can ever make.

