

“Follow Me”

Honoring Christ and Loving Others Through the Law



Missionary, Ambassador, Lawyer

BY JAMIE GROSSHANS

I burst into the hallway outside the courtroom, searching for opposing counsel. I was ready for a fight. After months in a bitter case and battling numerous frustrating motions, a slew of misrepresentations by the other side in court was too much for me to handle. Angry thoughts bubbled to the surface as I stormed into the hallway, but my target had already escaped. I took a few moments to breathe and muttered a verse to myself. A verse that included the words “jewels” and “swine.” Ten years practicing law and I still have moments where the frustration is overwhelming. These moments don’t come as often as they did in those early years of practice, but they still come in many forms: the difficult client, the dishonest attorney, the distracted judge.

This isn’t the life I had envisioned in my youth. As a teenager, I planned to be a missionary. I would travel the world and share Christ’s love in the far corners of civilization. In my college days, I decided I would be an ambassador. A glamorous missionary of sorts. There would be important decisions made. There would be exciting functions attended. There would be cultural experiences beyond my dreams. My focus in law school was international law and government affairs. Yet, here I am, standing in a hallway fuming over the actions of another attorney in a bitter custody dispute where two parents have lost sight of a young child struggling with a serious emotional

crisis. This doesn’t quite look like the impressive future I had imagined, but it is *my* present, *my* field, and *my* assignment.

As attorneys it’s easy to feel like we are not on the *mission field* in the traditional sense. But we have a unique calling. The mission field comes to us. The mission field hires us. As the Apostle Paul encourages, “*We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*” II Corinthians 5:20. We have the opportunity to deal with people at their worst. They are stressed. They are worried about the future. Sometimes that perspective can get lost in the daily frustrations of the practice of law, and it is these daily hurdles that can make balancing our roles as a follower of Jesus and a lawyer exceptionally challenging. Add in our competitive nature as attorneys, the desire to win, to be right, to control the outcome and prove our own legal abilities, and it’s easy to allow this profession to become a distraction from the fact that our calling goes beyond our profession. But once we step out of the fray, we wonder, “Doesn’t Jesus call us to more than this never-ending battle? Doesn’t He call us to a life of mercy and justice and sharing His love with others? How does a follower of Jesus in the battlefield of the law practice live in a way that sets us apart and shows the love of Christ to those around us? What really sets us apart as a light for Christ?”

A missional mindset can span all areas of practice. At the heart of the duller legal work there is a person with a need. From the largest corporate transaction to the petty theft, the drafting of a will to construction litigation to bankruptcy. At the heart of the practice of law is constant interaction with people. Fellow attorneys, corporate executives, misguided teenagers, the clerk at the courthouse, and the law firm assistant, all of whom observe the way we respond to each day's inevitable crisis. These interactions come in various shapes and forms but at the core is the interaction of souls. Christ seeks to use us, as inadequate as we may be, in each of those quickly passing moments to make His appeal to those around us. And it is in the difficult moments, both big and small, that we are truly defined as a Christ-following attorney. How we react to opposing counsel who has treated our case with derision. How we handle the client whose phone call we dread. How we respond when faced with yet another emergency in an already full day.

How can we best make the appeal for Christ in our legal careers? Two areas resonate the most with me as I face the daily challenges of practice. The first is through the use of gracious speech. Well-chosen words and, sometimes, well-chosen silence can define us in the midst of a profession not known for reticence. This is especially true with electronic communications. It takes a good bit of audacity to tell-off someone to their face or even over the phone. But anyone can shoot off a caustic email in the blink of an eye, often with regret as soon as the send button is clicked. Our reactionary words launched in the heat of an exasperating moment are now memorialized in permanent, written form.

I have never regretted waiting to respond, but I have frequently regretted responding too quickly. My instinct is to reply to an inaccurate email immediately or to launch instantly into a verbal duel over the phone regarding my opinion on a case. Rarely have I found this to achieve anything except exacerbating a difficult situation. In fact, the emails I want to respond to swiftly are usually the very ones where I should hesitate before answering. Pause. Consider. Analyze. Respond. Emotions are called into check when we give our discernment the time to rise to the surface. My client's interests are certainly not rewarded with my knee-jerk reaction, nor is Christ glorified by a tirade. As the apostle James exhorts us, *"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."* James 1:19. This isn't easy, but it is possible.

Recently, I was having a phone conversation with an older attorney who seemed confident he could convince me of a path that was not in my client's best interest. I politely declined his

offer and was rewarded with a string of cursing and frustration. He has been practicing law for forty-five years and still a moment's frustration erupted straight through the phone and onto me. I wanted to be angry back. I wanted to hang up on him (that would surely teach him a lesson). Instead, I opted for the shortest of pauses, composed my thoughts, and responded firmly but calmly to the outburst. The next day, the judge agreed with me, and we moved on. We eventually settled the case, and now I receive a hello and smile from him in the courthouse hallways. Clients should expect that their attorneys can control their own reactions to achieve the best result for the case. Even more so, Christ has commanded believers to show self-control so as to advance the Kingdom. Gracious speech sets us apart as we represent Christ to the world.

In addition to gracious speech, as Christ followers we must keep eternity in mind. When we look through the lens of eternity, we see the eternal souls that will persist far beyond not only the final judgment of a case, but also the final judgment of this world. The people we deal with even a brief, difficult moment are eternal. As the incomparable C.S. Lewis reminds us in *The Weight of Glory*, *"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."* The words, actions, and practices that we utilize give these eternal beings a glimpse of Christ in us—the hope of glory.

Last week a woman wept in my office for two hours, her life racked by issues far more serious than the law could remedy. No amount of brilliant legal training could prepare me for this client's issues. Family law and criminal defense work give me a unique opportunity to help on a very personal level; however, this concept doesn't apply only to those of us who practice "down and dirty" law. A tax attorney who shines the light of Christ in his own life can have the same impact for the kingdom as an attorney that stands beside a client for a plea in criminal court.

We all know the practice of law is, at times, overwhelming, vexing, and monotonous. We are faced with issues we didn't create but are hired to "just fix." While some issues may be repaired within the confines of the legal system, many cannot. If through my actions, attitudes, and words I can point in some way to the One who can restore lives from within, then I feel I have acted as an ambassador of Christ.

It is not always exciting. It is certainly not very glamorous. I haven't traveled to the edge of the world to lead Bible studies.

I've never set foot in a consulate. But I am a missionary. I am an ambassador. I will stand for my clients' rights even when the world would consider many of their problems insignificant. I will strive to be an example of Christ's love to those who are put across my path today. I will remind myself that words, once spoken, are not easily withdrawn. I will face my mission field with grace to share His love with others. I will choose to look at people beyond their short comings and treat them with the respect that an eternal soul demands.

*Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,*

*Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
~ St. Patrick*



Jamie Rutland Grosshans graduated *cum laude* from the University of Mississippi School of Law. During law school, she clerked for the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., and the United States

Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Mississippi. Following admittance to the Florida Bar, she served as an Assistant State Attorney for Orange County, Florida in both felony and misdemeanor divisions before founding Plant Street Law, PL where she practices family law and criminal defense. Mrs. Grosshans also serves as a Guardian Ad Litem and frequently provides pro bono representation for crisis pregnancy centers and other non-profit organizations. She is a Blackstone Fellow with the Alliance Defense Fund, serves on the Board of Directors for the Central Florida Christian Legal Society, and is an officer in the Central Florida Federalist Society. She lives in Winter Garden, Florida with her husband Joshua and their three children, Avery, Jack, and Alice.



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