

Cruciform Press

# TORN TO HEAL

GOD'S GOOD PURPOSE IN SUFFERING

Mike Leake

# **TORN TO HEAL**

*God's Good Purpose in Suffering*

**Mike Leake**

Cruciform Press | May, 2013

To my radiant wife, Nikki.  
Without your encouragement I would have never set  
pen to paper. You help me rest in His goodness.

– Mike Leake

**CruciformPress**

© 2013 by Mike Leake. All rights reserved.

[CruciformPress.com](http://CruciformPress.com) | [info@CruciformPress.com](mailto:info@CruciformPress.com)

“*Torn to Heal* is the most concise, readable, and helpful theology of suffering I’ve come across. The content, length, and tone is just perfect for those who are in the furnace of affliction screaming ‘Why?’”

**Dr. David Murray**, professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

“Mike Leake has taken the ugliness of suffering, turned it over in his capable hands, and shown God’s goodness and faithfulness in the midst. More than simple encouragement for those suffering, it is a handbook of scriptural truths about who God is and how he sustains.”

**Lore Ferguson** writes for The Gospel Coalition, Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, Deeper Church, Project TGM, and Sayable.net

“Nobody signs up for a life of suffering, but pain visits all of us. If you’re one of God’s children, suffering can cause you to question his goodness. What are his purposes? My friend Mike Leake delivers a clear, comforting, theologically robust view of pain and suffering. Not only does his theology give us permission to lament our pain, it drives us to the God of comfort who superintends our pain for his glory. This is a book you’ll want to read when you’re visited by suffering and a book you’ll easily pass out to those in your world who are feeling the sting of Adam’s curse.”

**Daniel Darling**, Senior Pastor, Gages Lake Bible Church; Author, *Real: Owning Your Christian Faith*

“*Torn to Heal* explores God’s redemptive purposes in human suffering in a concise, biblical, and authentic way. Mike shuns cliches and platitudes to help the reader put life’s hardships into divine perspective and to endure in Christ’s strength. It is a must-read for Christians in distress.”

**Dave Miller**, Second Vice-President, Southern Baptist Convention; Senior Pastor, Southern Hills Baptist Church, Sioux City, IA; Editor, *SBC Voices*

“Suffering well is one of the primary ways we demonstrate to the world that our source of satisfaction is Christ alone. In *Torn to Heal*, Mike Leake provides a powerful reminder of God’s good purposes during painful circumstances. Read this book and prepare to be conformed into the image of the Christ who suffered on our behalf.”

**Trevin Wax**, Managing Editor of The Gospel Project, author of *Clear Winter Nights*, *Gospel-Centered Teaching*, and *Counterfeit Gospels*

“While our culture does its best to insulate us from pain and suffering, God wants us to embrace it for his glory. Mike Leake encourages us to face suffering not with stoic disinterest or dualistic defeatism, but with the redemptive purposes of Christ in view. All readers will greatly benefit from *Torn to Heal* and will be challenged in how they approach one of God’s key means of growing us into greater Christlikeness.”

**Aaron Armstrong**, author of *Awaiting a Savior* and *Contend*; blogger at [bloggingtheologically.com](http://bloggingtheologically.com)

“Mike Leake takes us on a gospel-driven path between dualism that acts as if God has lost control of his world and fatalism/stoicism that tries to bury pain beneath emotionless acceptance of whatever happens. The result is a brief but potent primer for ordinary people on the purpose of suffering.”

**Timothy Paul Jones**, Associate Vice President for Online Learning, Professor of Leadership and Church Ministry, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

## Table of Contents

One	<i>The Promise and the Hope</i> . . . . .	7
Two	<i>Torn to Heal</i> . . . . .	17
Three	<i>The Healing Begins</i> . . . . .	31
Four	<i>Does God Really Tear?</i> . . . . .	39
Five	<i>Enemies to Suffering Well</i> . . . . .	53
	Dualism and Stoicism, Part 1	
Six	<i>Thieves of Hope and Help</i> . . . . .	65
	Dualism and Stoicism, Part 2	
Seven	<i>Finally Healed</i> . . . . .	81
	<i>Appendix: Two Lions</i> . . . . .	87
	Endnotes . . . . .	92
	More books from Cruciform Press. . . . .	95

# CruciformPress

something new in Christian publishing

**Our Books:** Short. Clear. Concise. Helpful. Inspiring. Gospel-focused. *Print; 3 ebook formats.*

**Consistent Prices:** Every book costs the same.

**Subscription Options:** Print books or ebooks delivered to you on a set schedule, at a discount. Or buy print books or ebooks individually.

## Pre-paid or Recurring Subscriptions

Print Book . . . . . \$6.49 each  
Ebook . . . . . \$3.99 each

## Non-Subscription Sales

1-5 Print Books . . . . . \$8.45 each  
6-50 Print Books . . . . . \$7.45 each  
More than 50 Print Books . . . . . \$6.45 each  
Single Ebooks ([bit.ly/CPebks](http://bit.ly/CPebks)) . . . . . \$5.45 each  
Bundles of 7 Ebooks . . . . . \$35.00  
Ebook Distribution Program . . . . . 6 pricing levels

---

*Torn to Heal: God's Good Purpose in Suffering*

Print / PDF ISBN: 978-1-936760-73-2  
ePub ISBN: 978-1-936760-75-6  
Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-936760-74-9

Published by Cruciform Press, Adelphi, Maryland. Copyright © 2013 by Mike Leake. All rights reserved. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from: *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Italics or bold text within Scripture quotations indicates emphasis added.

One

# **THE PROMISE AND THE HOPE**

No one ever told me that an undersized 10-year-old from a small midwestern town has basically no chance of growing up to become a professional athlete. If anyone had it wouldn't have mattered though, because it was my destiny. I was sure of it. And while it was nice that my mom and grandmother seemed to agree with me, that was nothing compared to the next name I put on the list.

Lou Brock.

Baseball Hall-of-Famer. Eighteen years in the majors. Lifetime .293 batting average. Destroyed Ty Cobb's stolen-base record. Lou Brock is a baseball god.

I was barely 10 when my uncles took me to some event where Brock was appearing. When it came time for questions I raised my hand. This just seemed like a fun way to participate, but somehow Brock spotted the goofy little kid with glasses and picked me. He pointed right at me! I didn't even have a bad question in mind much less a brilliant one. In the silence, my brain racing, the crowd around me seemed to grow from hundreds to at least a

million. I stumbled and stuttered and finally squeaked out a question: “What did it feel like to break a record?”

His answer was something about ghosts and them chasing you. I can’t exactly remember because I was too busy checking to see if my pants were still dry. But when it came time for autographs, I *do* remember what he said. As I walked up towards him, probably looking more like a 7-year-old than a 10-year-old, he smiled and said, “Hey kid, maybe someday *you’ll* break a record.”

Mom, Grandma, and now Lou Brock. My list of supporters had just gone world-class. I was instantly infused with hope. *Yeah! Maybe I can make it to the majors. Maybe I can be a professional baseball player and challenge Ricky Henderson for the stolen base record.*

(Editor’s Note: Mike Leake actually did make the major leagues as a pitcher for the Cincinnati Reds. The author hopes you will overlook the fact that this was a different Mike Leake.)

Of course Brock was just being nice to me, but his quip added fuel to the fire of my dreams. I took his words almost as a kind of promise—an authoritative baseball prophecy. And in my little-boy heart the flame of that promise burned bright and strong for a long time to come.

A promise from someone you trust can do that. It can shape your identity for years, or even a lifetime.

## **A God of Huge Promises**

God makes promises too, from Genesis to Revelation. The Christian faith hangs on those promises, and while the promise God made to Abraham was not the first

divine promise recorded in Scripture, it was the first to shape the identity of an entire people for thousands of years. In fact the story of Abraham “dominates the book of Genesis and casts a shadow which extends across the whole Bible.”<sup>1</sup> God’s promise to Abram (later renamed Abraham) in Genesis 12:1-3 may very well be “the text the rest of the Bible expounds.”<sup>2</sup> This particular promise would go on to shape the history, not merely of a nation, but of the entire world.

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

This promise to Abram stands in stark contrast to the brokenness that emerges in the Bible beginning in Genesis chapter 3. Then for the next eight chapters the reader encounters the fallen world with which we are all too familiar. Death, murder, pain, and rebellion smatter the pages as a pervasive corruption spreads throughout God’s good creation. This is the backdrop against which the shocking declaration of Genesis 12:1-3 is cast, telling us that in the midst of all this brokenness, blessing will appear. As Christopher Wright has aptly noted:

The call of Abraham is the beginning of God's answer to the evil of human hearts, the strife of nations, and the groaning of brokenness of his whole creation. It is the beginning of the mission of God and the mission of God's people.<sup>3</sup>

Through Abraham and his seed all the nations would be blessed. He and his innumerable seed would possess the land of promise forever and, as a friend of God, Abraham's name would be great.

This promise to Abram, though, is not new. It looks back to the pre-fall Edenic state of mankind. This formation of a new nation is really the reformation of a new humanity.<sup>4</sup> The Lord, through Abraham and his seed, is fulfilling God's original promise that the seed of the woman will crush the serpent (Genesis 3:15). Our calling as divine representatives and image-reflectors to rule, rest, and be in relationship would somehow be restored through the offspring of this old man named Abram.

## **Impossible Odds**

God's promises often seem shocking to us. They are God-sized promises, seldom anything we could hope to accomplish on our own. Naturally they can seem outlandish, even impossible.

God promises Abraham that his offspring will be a blessing to the whole world. But God does not make this promise when Abraham is 25 and with a fertile wife. No, he waits until Abraham is childless and pushing the century mark. He waits until the child-bearing days of

Abraham's wife, Sarah, are so long past that the very idea of her becoming pregnant is laughable.

That's the kind of promise God makes — the kind that's very hard to believe.

Consider Gideon. Not only is he the “least in his father's house, “his clan is “the weakest in Manasseh” (Judges 6:15). In a line of unimpressive people, he is the runt of the litter, yet God promises to use him to lead the defeat of a strong, vicious, powerful enemy. To us, that kind of promise makes no sense.

It didn't click for Gideon at first, either, so he keeps asking God for signs to confirm this unlikely and troubling assignment. Eventually Gideon accepts that God is really calling him to do this. That's when God turns up the heat.

As Gideon is tasked with selecting his army, he starts with 32,000 strapping young gents. This was a pretty sizable army for the time, but since the Midianites are described as being like locusts in number, and their camels uncountable (Judges 6:5, 7:12), Gideon might well have wished for more.

God's opinion? Gideon has way too many soldiers.

God instructs Gideon to test his army in two different ways in order to identify the best men for the task. After the first test is complete, Gideon's army has been reduced to 10,000 men.

Conquering the Midianites with an army of 10,000 would be quite a feat. Certainly it would take the Lord's help to accomplish this. But God wants to be known as more than a helper. God is nothing less than the deliverer

of his people, and the Israelites need to see this clearly. So God has Gideon run his men through a second test, a test only 300 of them pass. At this point Gideon's "army" consists of *less than one-tenth of one percent of the men it started with* and, as Gideon's Supreme Commander, God is beginning to look more like George Custer than General MacArthur.

But God still has one more change to make. As this relative handful of men is gearing up to go into battle, the Lord has them exchange their spears and swords for trumpets and jars with torches inside them. Weapons? Who needs weapons?

On the one hand this is starting to look like a suicide mission. But on the other hand there is this solemn promise from God himself: "I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand" (Judges 7:7). And God does exactly that.

The impossible happens, just like when God gave a baby to Abraham and Sarah (wait...do you suppose that when Sarah and her new baby smiled at each other, *both* of them were toothless?). God uses 301 guys (counting Gideon) and zero weapons to defeat an army of unimaginable size.

The one who makes a promise must have the ability to fulfill it, otherwise it's not a promise at all. God's promises are seldom small enough to be even slightly believable. At least, until they happen.

God is doing the same thing today. His promises are no smaller now than they were then. He tells us, "Look around your world. See how messed up it is? I'm going

to fix it all! I'm restoring everything." Seriously, God? Because we seem to be surrounded by pain, sickness, violence, corruption, deception, and death. Are you really saying that?

## Assaulted by Reality

- Jimmy's frail little body can hardly summon the strength to pack up his belongings. He'll be living with Grandma now after Mom and Dad's car crash. His pain is obvious, and he feels totally alone.
- Sarah's face exudes confidence and happiness. She really seems to have it together. But underneath she is raging with insecurity, doubt, hopelessness, and pain. Each careless word slices her like a blade. Soon it won't be metaphorical; the cuts will come by her own hand.
- Marcus has dreams of doing great things in service to God. He can hardly contain his passion for Jesus, at least on the good days. But here he is again with his heart ripped out by his pornography addiction. When will he ever find freedom? Is he even suited now to serve God? Has he blown all his dreams of serving his Savior and Lord?
- Betty never thought it would be possible, but she desperately misses the elbow to her back and the constant snoring. What was once the smallest bed imaginable now seems gigantic to this lonely widow.
- Anthony may only be 8 years old, but he has to take care of his younger siblings because they have all

been orphaned by AIDS. No health care, no source of income, nothing. They feel the pain of poverty and hunger every day. His little ribs are already exposed, and he doesn't have the fluid in his body to produce tears. But he's crying. He's crying for redemption.

In one way or another we are all assaulted by reality. We all live our own heart-wrenching stories. Yet in the midst of our brokenness something within us cries out for redemption. We want the brokenness fixed. Some of us turn outward, throwing ourselves into politics, picket lines, or preaching, trying to fix things on a larger scale. Others turn inward, seeking to build our own secure little existence, walled off from the madness. At the end of the day, all of us seek redemption from the brokenness within and without.

Why is this? How is it that we can look at all this brokenness and know in our hearts that things are "supposed to be different?" Why do we call suffering wrong if suffering is universal and absolutely normal? If we have never seen perfection, why do we crave it? How can we even have a category for it?

Because God made us for himself.

## **A People of Huge Hopes**

Part of the reason God makes huge, outlandish promises is because he made us to crave huge and outlandish things. What we all ultimately want more than anything else is relationship with the infinite God. We want to see the effects of the fall completely and fully erased. We want

to know and experience and be in the presence of perfect beauty, love, and power.

In terms of a fallen world these hopes are ridiculous and outrageous. But in terms of *who God made us to be*, they are perfectly natural. We simply want to be restored to the one from whom we were separated through Adam's sin, the one in whose image we were all created. And God's promises are leading us to the day when these impossibly wonderful desires to know him deeply and personally will be completely fulfilled.

For the believer there *will* be redemption, and there will be satisfaction. God promises to satisfy us with the only thing that can—himself. This leaves no room for small promises. A god who makes promises smaller than the vastness of our ultimate desires would be a small god, another salesman peddling an imitation. But God's promises fully match our best, highest, and innermost desires.

Again, why doesn't this match made in heaven work out better? Because we live neither in heaven nor in the garden of Eden. God's promises come to us in the context of a fallen world populated entirely by people whose best and ultimate desires are regularly overwhelmed by the immediacy of lesser desires. We are powerfully influenced by the greed, pride, and selfishness lurking in our hearts. The result is that, while we like the idea of receiving God's blessings, we often don't like the idea of God calling all the shots.

And that's where the problem comes in. You might say that all our struggles come down to not trusting God's

promises enough simply to obey him. To do things his way. We want to trust in ourselves. We grow impatient with God's timing or disapprove of his methods. We want to trust in idols, false gods that promise a quick fix.

Yet God is in the process of redeeming us. The process is slow and it is painful, but God will stop at nothing to bring it about. Completely. All things, both good and ill, work together for our greatest good—conformity to Jesus. This includes our pain. The premise of this book is that the Lord, *in his goodness*, will rip us to shreds if that's what it takes to replace our idols with lasting joy. He will stop at nothing to fully redeem us. He does this by changing our desires. And this is good.

Two

## **TORN TO HEAL**

A husband decides to lavish gifts upon his wife. He buys her flowers, and not just the five-dollar, grocery-store variety. He actually drops a fifty at the local florist. He stops by the mall and springs for the expensive perfume, the kind his wife always manages to “try out” in the store.

Then he finds the boutique dress shop on the main promenade of the mall where his wife had stopped a month earlier—the shop she had come out of a few minutes later, empty-handed and a little sad, yet gushing about a cute but very pricey blue dress. Before they left the mall that day, he had slipped away, talked to the store manager, and snapped a photo of the dress with his phone so he wouldn’t make a mistake. Now he’s at the rack, and there is the dress: costly, yes, but this is a husband on a mission to bless his bride, the apple of his eye.

He is pulling out all the stops now. He walks briskly to the mall’s fanciest department store and buys the expensive line of makeup. Last stop, the jewelers. He finds an amazing necklace. Elegant, understated, perfect for her. Sold.

The man carts everything home, puts the flowers

in a vase, gift-wraps the presents, and waits for an ideal moment that evening. As his wife opens the gifts she is ecstatic, utterly thrilled. Barely able to contain her joy, she leans over toward him, places her lips next to his ear, and whispers, “You are so amazing, so good to me. And I can’t wait to put all these gifts to good use.”

He smiles.

That was Wednesday. On Friday the husband drags himself home from a rough day at work. But his fatigue lifts in an instant when he enters the bedroom. His bride is putting on all her new things. She is ravishing, gorgeous, radiant.

The husband takes the cue and gets himself ready, his heart soaring with love for his chosen one. After a speedy shower and shave, he puts on his best clothes and a little of that cologne she loves. Walking out of the bedroom, trying to think of the perfect place to go to for dinner, he hears the front door close. Puzzled, he runs to the door, jerks it open, looks out, and sees his wife walking toward their car, looking amazing in her blue dress and necklace. He calls her name—with a smile in his voice, but also a question.

She doesn’t turn her head. She doesn’t slow down. “I’m going out. I have a date.” Then she gets in the car and drives away.

## **Infidelity**

Maybe you’re more sanctified than me, but at this point I just want to scream at the woman in this story. As I consider how she plotted to use those precious gifts from

her husband to entice another man, vile names rise up in my heart. For her to imagine that she is free to use those gifts for any purpose that may please her — what astonishing selfishness! What brazen unfaithfulness!

That's when I stop and realize what's really going on here. I'm not the loving and generous husband in this story. I am the adulterous wife.

This is how God's people have treated him from the beginning. Not constantly, not at every moment, but regularly and repeatedly. We take the gifts granted us by God in his lavish mercy and use them in ways he never intended. We use them to worship and serve the creature instead of the Creator.

How does God respond when his wife runs off to the arms of another? Remember, God has made a commitment to love and serve his bride, and he will not change his mind. He will never reject her. Instead, he will draw her back to himself, no matter what it takes.

In this book we will take a sobering look at an episode in the history of Israel that illustrates one of the means God uses to draw us back to himself when we have run off like a wayward bride. It is an episode drawn from the prophetic ministry of Hosea.

## **An Overview of Hosea's Ministry**

About 300 years before Hosea's ministry Israel's greatest king, David, ruled the land. During David's reign the promises God had made to Abraham were clearly being fulfilled. Israel's borders extended throughout the land of promise and the Israelites were a mighty people. Yet,

within a couple hundred years, Israel had been reduced to nothing more than a blip on the map. This was in large part due to Solomon's idolatry, which would "tear the kingdom from [him]" (1 Kings 11:11). Israel actually split into two adjoining mini-kingdoms. The kingdom to the north retained the name Israel, while the kingdom to the south was named Judah. As these two warred against one another, the resources of both were depleted. Life was hard, poverty was common, God's chosen people did not control the promised land, and the sense of God's blessing and care for them had become a distant memory.

Around the year 800 B.C., Israel and Judah formed a treaty with one another, and as a result the people began to enjoy substantially greater peace, abundance, and prosperity. Materially, things were good again, but spiritually the Israelites were following a tragically predictable pattern. Rather than turning to God in worship and gratitude for their material blessings, they turned away from him and used their prosperity for sinful indulgence. The rulers of Israel and Judah, although wise enough to join forces politically (at least for a while), fell headlong into idol worship. Even the worship of Yahweh became polluted by idolatrous practices.

It was in this climate that the prophet Hosea began his ministry. Hosea lived in the northern kingdom of Israel. He shocked everyone by boldly announcing that all this prosperity was about to be swept away. And he was right. Judgment came first internally, in the form of violence and political instability within Israel. A string of wicked, incompetent, and sometimes murderous kings

brought prosperity to a halt, and several of these rulers were assassinated in office as the result of power grabs. Society was in tatters, and then it got worse.

The northern kingdom of Israel had long suffered oppression from the much larger and more powerful nation of Assyria to the north. Israel's King Hoshea, hoping to get Assyria off his back, reached out to form an alliance with the other major power in the region, Egypt to the south. Hoshea's appeal to the Egyptians infuriated Assyria. God's judgment upon the divided kingdom of Israel, which had begun internally, was about to become external.

Assyria laid siege to Israel, eventually destroying the capital city of Samaria, imprisoning King Hoshea, and taking the people into exile. This was the lowest moment yet in Israelite history. Tragically, the warnings of judgment uttered by the prophet Hosea had come to pass.

## **The Pattern and the Exception**

The pattern of Israel's rebellion should seem familiar, for it is as old as the Garden of Eden. God promises to bless us, presenting a vision of a grand and glorious destiny, but we hijack the vision. We reject God's leadership in favor of our own.

- God promised Adam and Eve the perfect human existence. But after being tempted by the serpent they thought they could see a better way. Believing that the forbidden fruit offered something “to be desired” (Genesis 3:6), they sought out blessing on their own terms. They were banished from the garden.

- God promised to give Abraham and Sarah a child. But after waiting ten years they thought they could see a better way. So Hagar became a surrogate mother (Genesis 16) and bore Ishmael. Ishmael was certainly not the promised child.
- God promised Moses and Aaron he would give the Israelites water in the desert. But when Moses saw how unpopular he and Aaron were becoming with the people, he thought he could see a better way. He announced to the people that he and Aaron would be the ones to give them water. For this bit of self-glorification, Moses and Aaron were forbidden from entering the promised land.

Generation after generation, the rebellion of Adam and Eve has been re-enacted in the lives of their descendants. Fallen humanity naturally wants the shortcut to glory, not the long labor of love. It's not that we are continually wretched and constantly unfaithful. We have good days and bad days, good seasons and bad seasons.

In the good seasons our eyes are fixed on what the Lord has done and how he has already shown his faithfulness. We are like David ready to take on the giant — with a stick and some stones we'll go break some bones. On the best of these days we can feel like the return of God's garden is just around the corner.

In the bad seasons we have forgotten God's faithfulness. We are more like the unfaithful spies who see the size of the obstacles before us and begin wringing our hands, as if God has never been our help and our hope. On the

worst of these days we can feel like Job, sitting on the ash heap of all we count dear, barely able to remember that God exists.

But it is the undeniable trend that over time we grow weary of waiting for the fulfillment of promises, so we are tempted to turn from the Lord and try to grab control. We grow unsure that we really trust the Promise Maker. We still find God's promises supremely appealing, but at some point, consciously or not, we begin to think he is not going to deliver on them—or at least not with the timing and manner we think best. That's when we begin to take matters into our own hands. Just like the Israelites did time and time again, we look for the shortcut.

In Matthew 4 Jesus—the true Israel—was offered a shortcut too. In each temptation the devil tried to get Jesus to imagine that he could see a better route than the one God had offered. Would he trust in his Father's provision or would he try to acquire it through the serpentine shortcut? Would he choose the way of the cross to reign as God's King, or would he choose the easy path and reign as Satan's king?

The core issue we see in Jesus' temptation is the same one we see in the book of Hosea: will humanity trust in God's provision and plan or our own? Thankfully of course, Christ did not bow a knee to the serpent. In trusting God perfectly, he did what all before him had failed to do. Because he was the faithful and true Israel, the greater Adam, Christ can now accomplish our redemption.

All the promises God has made to us come through

Christ, and one day they will all be fulfilled perfectly and completely because of Christ. But today is not that day. We still have a path to walk, a pattern to follow, a cross to bear, a process to undergo. This is why we study Hosea.

The first three chapters of Hosea employ a dramatic analogy—as God’s people we are likened to an unfaithful wife. In a desperate attempt to escape our dissatisfaction and our impatience with God and his seemingly elusive promises, we take the path of self-destruction and throw ourselves at other lovers. But God wants us to feel the exuberance of living life and experiencing his joy in the way he intended. He wants us to live in the joys of redemption. What then should a good God do to awaken his bride? What can he possibly do to replace these God-belittling and soul-destroying affections with ones that are honoring to him? His wife may think she is content with being unfaithful, but God has much bigger plans for her. He still sees her as his precious bride. How will he recapture her heart?

His strategy is surprising.

## **The Lord’s Redemptive Strategy**

First, it is surprising that a redemptive strategy even exists. This kind of adultery is no accident or misstep. It is the result of an open, intentional, brazen betrayal in the face of a loving and gracious husband. But God will not give up on his plan or alter it in the slightest. At the corporate level, God has determined that through the seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth *shall* be blessed. At the individual level, the Father has crushed and sacrificed

his own Son so that particular individuals might be joined to that corporate bride. Therefore both individually and corporately, the wayward ones must be won back. So we will be.

Second, the strategy is surprising because the means God uses to draw us back seem counterintuitive. I would be inclined to lavish more gifts on a wayward wife in hopes of winning her back. But God takes precisely the opposite approach. The Lord outlines his strategy in the heavily metaphorical passage of Hosea 2:2-13.

<sup>2</sup>Plead with your mother, plead—  
for she is not my wife,  
and I am not her husband—  
that she put away her whoring from her face,  
and her adultery from between her breasts;  
<sup>3</sup>lest I strip her naked  
and make her as in the day she was born,  
and make her like a wilderness,  
and make her like a parched land,  
and kill her with thirst.  
<sup>4</sup>Upon her children also I will have no mercy,  
because they are children of whoredom.  
<sup>5</sup>For their mother has played the whore;  
she who conceived them has acted shamefully.  
For she said, “I will go after my lovers,  
who give me my bread and my water,  
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.”  
<sup>6</sup>Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns,  
and I will build a wall against her,

so that she cannot find her paths.

<sup>7</sup>She shall pursue her lovers

but not overtake them,

and she shall seek them

but shall not find them.

Then she shall say,

“I will go and return to my first husband,

for it was better for me then than now.”

<sup>8</sup>And she did not know

that it was I who gave her

the grain, the wine, and the oil,

and who lavished on her silver and gold,

which they used for Baal.

<sup>9</sup>Therefore I will take back

my grain in its time,

and my wine in its season,

and I will take away my wool and my flax,

which were to cover her nakedness.

<sup>10</sup>Now I will uncover her lewdness

in the sight of her lovers,

and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.

<sup>11</sup>And I will put an end to all her mirth,

her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths,

and all her appointed feasts.

<sup>12</sup>And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,

of which she said,

“These are my wages,

which my lovers have given me.”

I will make them a forest,

and the beasts of the field shall devour them.

<sup>13</sup>And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals  
when she burned offerings to them  
and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry,  
and went after her lovers  
and forgot me, declares the LORD.

Let's recall now that God is speaking about the northern kingdom of Israel and how she had strayed from him. The people had begun to worship the Baals, the false gods of the surrounding nations. They had even brought these pagan religious practices into the worship of Yahweh. And in seeking relief from the oppression of Assyria, Israel's King Hoshea did not turn back to Yahweh, did not banish the worship of false gods from his nation, and did not plead for God's help. Instead he looked to Egypt's gods for help—when it was Egypt from whom God had rescued the Israelite slaves to begin with! This is the sort of thing Hosea has in mind when he makes reference to “feast days of the Baals” (v 13), to whoredom (vv 2-5), and to lovers who supposedly provide good things to this metaphorical wayward wife (v 12).

So God takes severe measures to show his bride how bad her decisions have been. He lets her taste what life is like apart from the blessing of God, what are the perfectly natural results of rejecting God's good plan. God withholds his gifts and goodness, thus exposing the inability of false gods to offer anything of lasting value. From this passage we see three steps that compose the Lord's strategy of tearing his wayward wife.

- He will take away the idols
- He will take back his gifts
- He will expose her

## **He Will Take Away the Idols**

*Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. (Hosea 2:6-7a)*

In keeping with a literary style of that era, Hosea piles metaphor upon metaphor by talking about livestock. Shepherds in ancient Israel often used stone walls and hedges of thorns to fence cattle into their pasture. In many places the walls made it impossible for the cattle to break out. In some places the cattle could push through the thorns if they really wanted to, but only at the cost of considerable pain. Hosea is saying that God is making it much more difficult for Israel to break out from the safe and pleasant place in which God has placed her. The Lord is going to block her way from indulging in these lesser lovers. He is going to strip the idols away from her.

If Israel insists on continuing to run after false gods, it will either be frustratingly impossible (stone walls) or unusually difficult and painful (thorns). Or both. God is beginning to show her that she has chosen an unfruitful path.

## He Will Take Back His Gifts

*And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal. Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. (Hosea 2:8-9)*

Once Israel begins to see that pursuing false gods is both frustrating and painful, God will show her that the goodness she thought came from these false gods was actually stolen riches.

Israel has been attributing all the staples of life and all her successes and pleasures to her other lovers. She no longer sees God as her Provider, but instead has given that title to the false gods who have gained her affections. In response to this treachery the Lord is going to take back his gifts.<sup>5</sup> He is going to remove his hand of blessing.

You and I—Yahweh’s adulterous bride—must come to understand that it is God who gives all good things. When we forget, we must be reminded that all things desirable are simply undeserved gifts from the Sovereign One. Every good thing God’s people possess has come from him.

When God’s good gifts are removed, Israel will be without a source of income. She will have no “wages” (v 12) from her unfaithfulness.<sup>6</sup> Even God’s appointed feasts and celebrations will be taken away (v 11). Apart from God’s blessing, the things that brought her joy

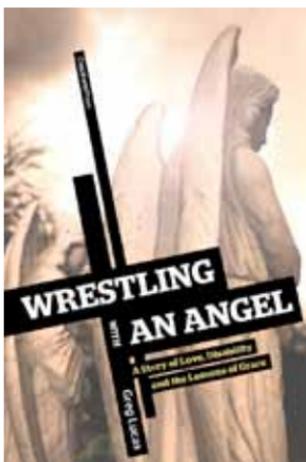
and comfort will prove unreliable. There will be no more hiding behind the luxury that she thought her unfaithfulness had purchased for her. Those riches will finally be seen as false. She will end up so desperately poor that she is reduced to nakedness.

## **He Will Expose Her**

*Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.  
(Hosea 2:10)*

At this point Israel has nothing, not even the fig leaves of the garden with which to cover herself. All will see that without her God she is utterly hopeless and helpless. Yahweh is going to isolate his bride from her false lovers, strip away all her blessings, and leave her exposed. In the process he will reveal the complete inability of the Baals to provide for her on their own. Truly these gods are false.

These are radical steps God takes. They can even be called harsh. But they are far from cruel, because the motivation behind them is nothing but love. These radical steps will be the means to her rescue. A drastic predicament demands a radical solution.



## [Wrestling with an Angel](#)

A Story of Love, Disability  
and the Lessons of Grace

by Greg Lucas

**The riveting, inspiring true story that readers have called “a touchstone book of my life,” and “alternately hilarious and heartbreaking,” a book that “turns the diamond of grace in such a way that you see facets you never really noticed before.”**

“C.S. Lewis wrote that he paradoxically loved *The Lord of the Rings* because it ‘broke his heart’— and Greg Lucas’ writing does the same for me.”

***Justin Taylor, Managing Editor, ESV Study Bible***

“Witty... stunning... striking... humorous and heartfelt. *Wrestling with an Angel* provides a fresh, honest look at one father’s struggle to embrace God in the midst of his son’s disability. Can sheer laughter and weeping gracefully coexist in a world of so much affliction? Greg knows all about it. I highly recommend this wonderfully personal book!”

***Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends International***

“You will laugh; you will cry. You will feel sick; you will feel inspired. You will be repulsed by the ugliness of sin; you will be overwhelmed by the love of God. Greg Lucas takes us on an unforgettable ride as he extracts the most beautiful insights into grace from the most painful experiences of life.”

***David P. Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary***

“Greg Lucas is a captivating storyteller. When he writes about life with Jake, I recognize God’s grace and loving persistence in my life. I want more!”

***Noël Piper, author, and wife of pastor and author John Piper***

## **Wrestling with an Angel, by Greg Lucas**

Excerpts from Chapter One

It sounded at first like something out of an old horror movie. I thought maybe someone was just playing around, but then I heard it again and again, a loud piercing cry, and less like Hollywood every time. The windows were down in my police cruiser on that warm fall day, but I still couldn't tell where the sounds came from. I began looking around for the unlikely sight of someone being disemboweled in a mall parking lot on a Saturday afternoon. Seeing nothing, and still hearing the screams, I called in a "disturbance." Around the next corner I found the source of the commotion.

A small crowd had their backs to me, watching what I could only imagine was a horrible fight between two grown men. As I rolled up to the scene, I notified 911 of my location and turned on my overhead emergency lights, hoping to disperse the brawl with a sudden display of authoritative police presence. Not until I exited my vehicle, ready to inflict some defensive tactics if needed, did I comprehend what was actually taking place.

Sitting in the middle of the parking lot was a full-grown man with his socks and shoes off, hitting himself in the face and screaming. An elderly gentleman was trying his best to collect the socks and shoes and get him on his feet again. But the seated man, the much larger of the two, would not be budged.

It was clear to everyone that the man on the ground was mentally disabled, and the elderly man was his father. The onlookers didn't know whether to call for help, offer help, or politely walk away. They seemed relieved that a uniformed official was there to deliver them from their paralyzing confusion.

I immediately cleared the crowd and asked the father if he needed assistance. The elderly man explained to me that he had picked up his son for a day visit from the group home where he lived.

"I knew better than to go at it alone, but sometimes he does really well. I wanted to spend some time with him so I brought him to the mall to get him some new shoes. He was fine until we got to the parking lot," said the exasperated dad. "When he gets upset he takes off his socks and shoes. His name is Donald."

....

...all I could focus on was the exhaustion and defeat in this father's eyes. My attention came back to his words when I heard him

say in a cracked and broken voice, "I'm getting too old for this."

I guessed he was probably in his mid- to late-60s, but he looked to be nearly 80. He was tall and thin and frail-looking, white-haired and balding. He wore a dark flannel shirt and blue jeans, like an old farmer come to town for supplies. I could only imagine the hurt, disappointment, and weariness this man had experienced over the previous thirty years. But I didn't exactly have to imagine everything.

As he turned away for a moment, frustrated with the scene his son had created, the father muttered, "I'm so tired." I paused for a moment to let him regain his composure. Then I realized why I was there.

"I know what you are going through, Sir," I said, recognizing at the moment it escaped my mouth how cliché it must sound.

"You do?" he said skeptically.

"Yes, I do. I have a son just like your son. He's much younger and not nearly as big. But he has special needs like your Donald, and he throws very similar fits when he doesn't get his way. His name is Jake, and he is my life's great challenge."

I placed my hand on the dad's shoulder and smiled, "And I know you're tired."

I cautiously knelt back down to Donald's level and picked up his shoes and socks. I wasn't sure how he would react to me invading his space and I fully expected to be kicked or punched by this large, confused man. Slowly I un-balled one of his socks and began putting it back on his foot. To my relief, he extended his leg in a sort of surrender to let me know he would comply.

....

A stark vision from John 13 of Jesus washing His disciples' feet flashed across my mind, and I smiled as I thought to myself that the Lord may have had even this day and this parking lot in mind when He told His confused disciples, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."

....

After buckling Donald in, the elderly man returned to his side of the truck with a simple expression of gratitude.

....

Just before climbing into the truck he turned to me and said, "You know it gets worse, right?"

"What gets worse?" I asked.

“Your son,” he replied. “It gets worse as they get older and you get older. They get stronger and you get weaker. You still love them the same, but it becomes impossible for you to take care of them. Even short visits become like this—impossible.”

His words crushed me as I began to see myself in his weary face. I struggled to find some departing words of encouragement and hope—words for two desperate dads living in different seasons of the same struggling life.

“Grace is like that, you know,” I said in response. “It exposes our weakness in order to give us greater strength. I guess that’s why we all have to depend on someone a little stronger than ourselves.” At the moment, it was the best I could do.

“Yeah, I guess so,” he replied contemplatively as he shut the truck door. “Thanks again, friend,” and he drove away.

As the two men rolled off the parking lot in the old pickup truck, I watched the weary dad lift his arm and place it around the shoulder of his disabled son. A prodigal never finds love so satisfying and sweet as he finds it in the unconditional arms of his father.

I returned to my police cruiser, drove to the far end of the parking lot, and fell to pieces, wrestling hard against the tears of stored-up emotion liberated through this unexpected encounter. Through force of will I soon regained my composure, hoping no one had glimpsed this tough, stoic, in-control cop crying like an infant.

The thought of it ever getting any more difficult absolutely devastated me. As hard as it had been, I had always clung to the hope that someday it would get better; someday it would get easier. I lived with an unspoken assumption that someday Jake would learn to use the bathroom, someday learn to communicate his needs, someday be less frustrated, less combative, less compulsive, less confused. That someday I would be able to hold it all together and be the dad I ought to be for Jake.

The cold, hard truth had hit me like a storm. It might actually get worse.

*My body will get older and weaker and Jake will get bigger and stronger and more defiant. His needs will increase as my abilities to care for him decrease. No matter how frail I get, Jake will never be able to care for me—it will never be that way with us. Jake will always need to be taken care of, and someday I will not be able to give him what he needs.*

I hear religious-minded people all the time say with good intentions, “God will never place a burden on you so heavy that you cannot carry it!”

Really?

My experience is that God will place a burden on you so heavy that you cannot possibly carry it alone. He will break your back and your will. He will buckle your legs until you fall flat beneath the crushing weight of your load. All the while He will walk beside you waiting for you to come to the point where you must depend on Him.

“My power is made perfect in your weakness,” He says, as we strain under our burden.

Whatever the burden, it might indeed get worse, but I know this—God is faithful. And while we change and get old, He does not. When we get weaker, He remains strong. And in our weakness and humility, He offers us true, lasting, transforming, and undeserved grace.

It is this grace that enables us to do more than survive in this world. Grace enables us to thrive in the presence of this world’s sufferings while magnifying the One who breaks us with affliction—that He might equip us with comfort, compassion, and strength to give to others.

In the midst of this deep, celestial moment, I realized I had just experienced a divine appointment. This was not just a providential assignment for an empathetic police officer sent to help a weary father with his disabled son. This was more, a lesson of grace that would stay locked in my own heart until I would need it most in the months and years to come.

And I would need it.

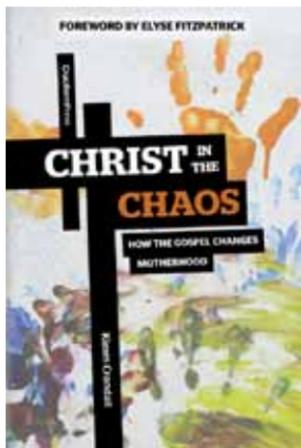
In response, I stood for a moment on holy ground praising the God of mercy and comfort, asking for more strength and grace for the future with my own son. My worshipful hymn and prayer of praise sounded like this:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the same comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

(2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

***Wrestling with an Angel* can be found at [bit.ly/CPWrestle](https://bit.ly/CPWrestle)**

[bit.ly/Christ-in](http://bit.ly/Christ-in)



## [Christ in the Chaos](#)

How the Gospel Changes  
Motherhood

by Kimm Crandall

**MOMS: Stop comparing yourself to others. Stop striving to meet false expectations. Stop thinking your performance dictates your worth.**

**Look to the gospel for rest, joy, sufficiency, identity, and motivation.**

“Although Kimm Crandall’s message would revive any soul longing for the breath of the gospel of grace, I am especially eager to recommend this book to that heart who strives to know God and to make him known to the little ones who call her ‘Momma.’ Kimm is a candid and gracious fellow sojourner, faithfully pointing to God’s immeasurable steadfast love and grace in the midst of our mess.”

***Lauren Chandler, wife of Matt Chandler (pastor of The Village Church), mother of three, writer, singer, and speaker***

“What an amazingly wild and wise, disruptive and delighting, freeing and focusing book. Kimm’s book is for every parent willing to take the stewardship of children and the riches of the gospel seriously. This is one of the most helpful and encouraging books on parenting I’ve read in the past twenty years. This will be a book you will want to give to parents, to-be parents, and grandparents.”

***Scotty Smith, author; Founding Pastor, Christ Community Church***

“Kimm Crandall has discovered that chaos can be the perfect context in which to experience God’s liberating grace. She is a wise, practical, gospel-drenched guide for anyone navigating through the wearisome terrain of parenting.”

***Tullian Tchividjian, author; Pastor, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church***

## **Christ in the Chaos, by Kimm Crandall**

### Complete Author Introduction

Something odd happens when a woman becomes a mother. The change begins the moment she finds out she is pregnant. It starts within, as her sense of identity shifts. Soon, as if by some irresistible force, books, pamphlets, and coupons of an entirely different kind begin to enter her life. New expectations appear, too. A new mother can spend her entire pregnancy feeling the pressure of eating right, exercising enough, gaining just the right amount of weight, gathering the countless things a baby needs, researching the best way to labor and feed and diaper. The list goes on and on.

Then the baby comes—a beautiful, perfect little bundle of blessing. Somehow, though, within a few days the “mom laws” always show up at the doorstep with a great thud, a massive manual of seemingly non-negotiable do’s and don’ts which can crush the spirit of wonder and excitement a new baby brings. Many moms dutifully drag this manual inside, crack it open, and strive to live by its unyielding dictates. I know I did.

In chapter one of the mom manual, we find our identity in the unique chaos of diapers, strollers, and feeding schedules. We arrive at chapter two and live in the world of baby food and play dates. Chapter three covers school pictures and piano lessons. As the book continues, we move through the teen years, on into college and young adulthood. At every turn in our lives, the lesson is relentlessly reinforced: thou shalt not disobey the mom manual. Whether through books, blogs, or even the pressure of other moms (be it spoken or unspoken) it can seem as though life has been reduced to a single standard, one that is both iron-clad yet somewhat vague: the value of our motherhood stands or falls on how well we follow the manual.

The book you now hold in your hands is for moms who sense that the manual is not the last word. Moms who have been beaten down by endless demands to simply “try harder” and “do better.” Moms starved of grace. Moms who have been told they must perform to a specific standard if they want to be godly women.

This book is for moms who need to hear how the gospel changes motherhood.

As a mother, I need to hear over and over the good news that Christ came to be my friend when I hated him. (Because some days, it looks like I still do.) I need to hear the good news that he lived a perfect sinless life on my behalf because he knew just how much I would make a mess of things. (Which I do on a regular basis.) He

knew at times I would yell at my kids (yes), not desire my husband (it happens), and want to run away screaming (which happens surprisingly often). He knew my doubts and fears, and he knew I could never live a life acceptable to his perfect standard. So he lived ... for me.

Jesus lived without ever letting a twinge of impatience color his voice. In crowded settings, he never got annoyed at all of the touching, and he never treated others as less important than himself. But here's where the Christian version of the mom manual so often gets it wrong—Jesus didn't do all this so I could primarily focus on trying harder and asking "What would Jesus do?" every time chaos ensues.

Jesus is not only my example... He is my replacement.

Jesus came to do everything I haven't done and could never do, and he did it sinless and perfectly. Then, he died the perfect death for my righteousness.

Not once did he open his mouth when falsely accused, nor lash out at those who didn't believe. In quietness he was beaten, stripped, and nailed to a beam of wood, and he willingly did it because of my sin. He was the spotless lamb sacrificed for all the polluted filth of my life; I couldn't get clean any other way. He was separated from his Father so he could take on the loads of wrath which my sin deserved. He suffered so there would be no condemnation against me. None!

Jesus served me on the cross by taking my record of sin—all the heinous deeds I would ever commit—and replacing it with the grace gift of his perfect, righteous record so that when God looks at me, he is not disappointed or disgusted but instead says, "This is my beloved daughter with whom I am well pleased, always and forever—not just when she is doing good, and even when she runs from me."

This book is about what that kind of grace looks like for mothers specifically. It's about how Christ gives peace to women laboring under the burden of all those unwritten mom rules. It's about how Christ sets mothers free to love him.

You will find the chapters of this book are sound, but short. To the point, but not heavy—just right for the mom who has been up all night with the baby, the mom who only has a few minutes waiting for the school bus, and for the mom who relishes her own bathroom breaks as an opportunity to read a couple of pages even if her toddler spends the whole time pounding on the door. This book will not weigh you down with another list of things to do but aims to free

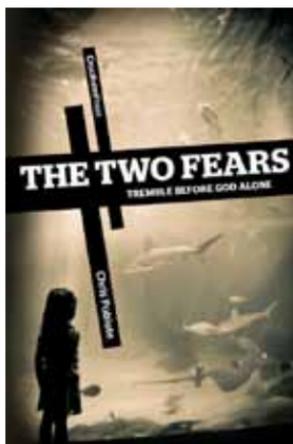
you by reminding you of what's already been done for you.

Let this book shout "Gospel!" loud and clear over all the noisy, pushy mom laws. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing you need now in the thick of mothering. The gospel will get you through those long nights of newborns crying and those long days of caring for clingy, feverish toddlers. Take the gospel with you on those car trips back and forth from soccer to piano. Let the gospel guide you when you drop your "baby" off at college and he steps forward into young adulthood. Bask in Christ's love for you and bathe in the outrageous grace you receive day-in and day-out no matter how many times you fail: the gospel will help you find Christ in all that goes on within and around you.

My years with children have seen lots of laughter and tears, illness and sweetness, pleasure and pain, depression and joy. Through the chaos and the trials, God has awakened my heart to the good news that he is not mad at me—there is grace for this sinful mother. God has changed me through his gospel, giving me a new love and a new life, and I hope the same thing will happen to you as you read the good news of his grace and mercy in this book.

Are you looking for Christ in your chaos? As you journey through these pages with me, I pray you will begin to see just how much Christ loves you ... in your chaos, too.

***Christ in the Chaos* can be found at [bit.ly/Christ-in](https://bit.ly/Christ-in)**



## [The Two Fears](#)

Tremble Before God Alone

by Chris Poblete

**You can fear God...  
or everything else.**

**Only one fear brings life and hope,  
wisdom and joy.**

**Fear wisely.**

"We are too scared. And we aren't scared enough. Reading this book will prompt you to seek in your own life the biblical tension between 'fear not' and 'fear God.'"

***Russell D. Moore, Dean, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary***

"An importantly counter-cultural book, moving us beyond a homeboy God we could fist-bump to a holy God we can worship. *The Two Fears* helps us recover a biblical fear of God and all the awe, repentance, and freedom from self-centered fears that go with it. An awesome resource!"

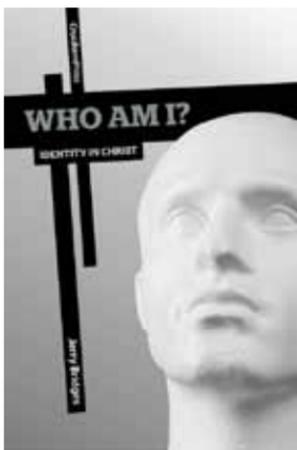
***Dr. Thaddeus Williams, professor, Biola University***

"In this practical and very readable book, Chris Poblete shows how both the absence of true fear and the presence of 'unholy [false] fear' stem from an absence of a knowledge of the awesome God of the Bible, and that, in meeting him, we discover the real dimensions of creation existence and the wonderful benefits of living in fear and deep respect before him, freed from the [false] fear of men."

***Peter Jones, Ph.D., TruthXchange, Scholar-in-Residence and Adjunct Professor, Westminster Seminary in California***

"I commend this book to you: it will fuel your worship and empower your discipleship."

***Gabe Tribbett, Christ's Covenant Church, Winona Lake, IA***



## [Who Am I?](#)

Identity in Christ

by Jerry Bridges

**Jerry Bridges unpacks Scripture to give the Christian eight clear, simple, interlocking answers to one of the most essential questions of life.**

“Jerry Bridges’ gift for simple but deep spiritual communication is fully displayed in this warm-hearted, biblical spelling out of the Christian’s true identity in Christ.”

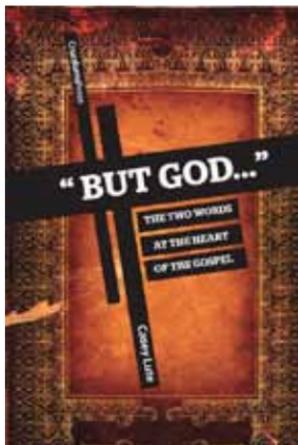
***J. I. Packer, Theological Editor, ESV Study Bible; author, Knowing God, A Quest for Godliness, Concise Theology***

“I know of no one better prepared than Jerry Bridges to write *Who Am I?* He is a man who knows who he is in Christ and he helps us to see succinctly and clearly who we are to be. Thank you for another gift to the Church of your wisdom and insight in this book.”

***R.C. Sproul, founder, chairman, president, Ligonier Ministries; executive editor, Tabletalk magazine; general editor, The Reformation Study Bible***

“*Who Am I?* answers one of the most pressing questions of our time in clear gospel categories straight from the Bible. This little book is a great resource to ground new believers and remind all of us of what God has made us through faith in Jesus. Thank the Lord for Jerry Bridges, who continues to provide the warm, clear, and biblically balanced teaching that has made him so beloved to this generation of Christians.”

***Richard D. Phillips, Senior Minister, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC***



## [“But God...”](#)

The Two Worlds at the Heart of the Gospel

by Casey Lute

**Just two words.  
Understand their use in Scripture,  
and you will never be the same.**

“Keying off of nine occurrences of “But God” in the English Bible, Casey Lute ably opens up Scripture in a manner that is instructive, edifying, encouraging, and convicting. This little book would be useful in family or personal reading, or as a gift to a friend. You will enjoy Casey’s style, you will have a fresh view of some critical Scripture, and your appreciation for God’s mighty grace will be deepened.”

***Dan Phillips, Pyromaniacs blog, author of The World-Tilting Gospel (forthcoming from Kregel)***

“A refreshingly concise, yet comprehensive biblical theology of grace that left this reader more in awe of the grace of God.”

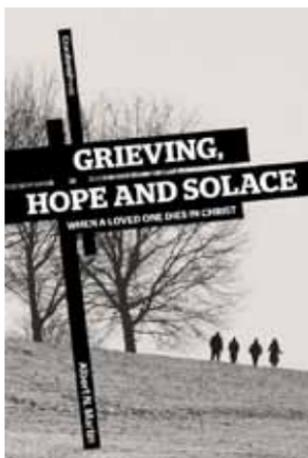
***Aaron Armstrong, BloggingTheologically.com***

“Casey Lute reminds us that nothing is impossible with God, that we must always reckon with God, and that God brings life out of death and joy out of sorrow.”

***Thomas R. Schreiner, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary***

“A mini-theology that will speak to the needs of every reader of this small but powerful book. Read it yourself and you will be blessed. Give it to a friend and you will be a blessing.”

***William Varner, Prof. of Biblical Studies, The Master’s College***



## [Grieving, Hope and Solace](#)

When a Loved One Dies in Christ

by Albert N. Martin

**There is comfort for the grief.  
There are answers to the questions.  
The Bible does offer hope, solace,  
healing, and confidence.**

**Pastor Albert Martin has been there.**

“This tender book by a much-loved pastor, written after the death of his beloved wife, offers comfort to those in tears. A rare guidebook to teach us how to grieve with godliness, it is relevant to us all – if not for today, then no doubt for tomorrow.”

***Maurice Roberts, former editor, Banner of Truth magazine***

“Albert N. Martin is a seasoned pastor, skilled teacher, and gifted writer who has given us a priceless treasure in this book. All who read these pages will, unquestionably, be pointed to Christ and find themselves greatly helped.”

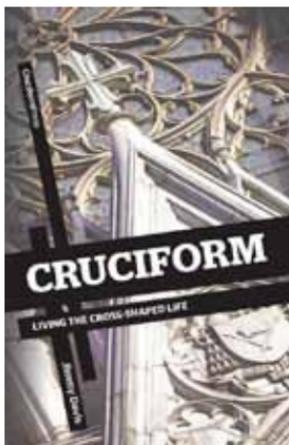
***Steve Lawson, Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Mobile, AL***

“Like turning the corner and being met by a glorious moonrise, or discovering a painter or musician who touches us in the deepest recesses of our being—this little book by Pastor Al Martin has been such an experience for me. Whether you are a pastor or counselor, one who is experiencing the pangs of grief, or a member of the church who wants to be useful to others, you need to read this book.”

***Joseph Pipa, President, Greenville Presbyterian Theo. Sem.***

“Personal tenderness and biblical teaching in a sweet book of comfort. Buy it and give it away, but make sure to get a copy for yourself.”

***Dr. Joel R. Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theo. Sem.***



## [Cruciform](#)

Living the Cross-Shaped Life

by Jimmy Davis

**This is the shape of the gospel.**

“Jimmy Davis loves the cross. This little book will open your heart up to see how the cross is the center of all of life. Well done.”

— **Paul Miller, Director of**  
**seeJesus.net, author of**  
***A Praying Life***

“Jimmy Davis shows us how to cut through the fog of contemporary Christian thinking to recover the Savior’s plan for our lives.”

***T.M. Moore, Dean, Chuck Colson’s Centurions Program***

“Jimmy shows from personal experience how a lack of passion and purpose, focus and fervor, compassion and conviction, is always due to distance from the now-power of the gospel. I pray that through this book you will rediscover the beauty and brilliance of the gospel in brand new ways.”

***Tullian Tchividjian, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church***

“*Cruciform* is a theologically grounded and redemptively freeing picture of a life spent boasting in the cross of Jesus.”

***Scotty Smith, Christ Community Church***

“This book will be a help to everyone struggling with ‘Why, God?’ I believe every person planning for, and serving, in a place of Christian ministry should read this book.”

***Dr. Brian Richardson, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary***

“This is a terrific book for those breakfast discipleship groups. It is the next one I am going to use.”

***Dr. William E. Brown, President, Cedarville University***