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EDUCATION or IMITATION?

BIBLE INTERPRETATION

FOR DUMMIES LIKE YOU AND ME

Curtis Allen

How can we interpret Scripture rightly? It's less about education and more about imitation. Imitate Jesus.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

"Gritty. Real. Straight. That's what you'll find in Curt Allen's treatment of Bible interpretation, *Education or Imitation?* And that's what we need because airy, heady, abstract works on Bible interpretation fail to do the one thing they're written for—to teach and inspire us to read, interpret, and apply the Bible. If you want it straight, read this book."

Thabiti Anyabwile, Author; Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Grand Cayman; Council Member, The Gospel Coalition

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"Curt Allen's book on interpreting the Bible is wonderfully practical and clear, giving believers basic principles for understanding God's Word. He rightly emphasizes that every believer can understand the Bible. It isn't necessary to be a scholar or preacher or to know Greek and Hebrew to grasp the Scriptures. Certainly, we are helped by teachers and scholars, but we can understand the Bible ourselves and need to test whatever others say by the Scriptures. Allen also shows that the Bible is Christ-centered. We are only reading the Bible rightly if we are seeing Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Lord, in its pages. At the same time, the Bible is not just meant to be understood but to be lived out in our everyday lives. I recommend gladly such an accessible, Christ-centered, and practical book on interpreting the Scriptures."

Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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*Bible Interpretation for Dummies
Like You and Me*

Curtis Allen

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Shout outs:

To my wife, Betsy, and our sons Santiago, Giovanni,
and Mateo. And to my church family at The Rock!

May we all know our Bibles well enough
to imitate Jesus.

– Curtis Allen

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One

WHY INTERPRETATION MATTERS IN EVERYTHING

What You Don't Know Can Kill You

I sat in a smoke-filled room in an apartment complex in Laurel, Maryland, watching Jerry and José. They were city boys from New York, and they had the undivided attention of some dudes from my 'hood.

The rest of us in the room called ourselves The Second Gen, or The Gen. We were the newest generation of street thugs active in and around Washington, DC. All of us were criminals by nature and most of us were criminals under the law. Drugs, guns, drug deals, violent crime, handcuffs, mug shots, indictments, court cases, and prison time were just part of our lifestyle. At that time, DC was known as the murder capital of the United States, and for good reason.

Even though I was one of the best-known drug

dealers in the area, I was one of the few from The Gen who hadn't been arrested yet. I made thousands of dollars a week selling crack cocaine to people from all over the place. I was proud of it, and I was proud of the fact that my 'hood respected me for it. I respected them, too. I had learned a lot about the street game from these dudes. They had taught me how to survive on evil streets.

Another thing I respected about these guys was their ability to read people. I had always been good at this myself and, as we say in the street, "game recognizes game." You respect others who are like you. I trusted these dudes with my life. We did a lot together. We sold and used drugs, shot guns at rival gangs, went on trips to New York and Atlantic City just to blow money and find girls, recorded many rap songs, and often lived in each other's apartments. We were family.

We respected and trusted no one more than each other, which is why I was a little surprised to see the kind of respect Jerry and José were getting. We hardly knew these guys. My man "D" had met them and brought them to our apartment. I didn't like that because we sold crack out of that apartment and smoked a lot of weed there. Not to mention that undercover police were always on the prowl posing as fellow drug dealers and users. They had locked up many of our friends, and for that reason alone we always played it extra cautious around people we didn't really know.

Nonetheless, in walks D with Jerry and José. I quickly began hiding guns, drugs, and other things as they all came in the front door. On the kitchen counter in

plain sight was enough illegal paraphernalia to warrant a federal drug raid. I was irritated at D for being so stupid as to bring two dudes we didn't know to the apartment and not call us ahead of time to make sure we weren't "dirty." If we were, and Jerry and José had been undercover, my "not arrested yet" streak would be over.

I hid what I could in the back room and came out to meet Jerry and José. I thought it would be a quick hello/goodbye type of thing, but as time went on, it became clear they weren't going anywhere. The room was filled with weed smoke as we heard story after story about the Bronx. Jerry and José were real comical dudes, with accents funnier than the stories they were telling. José's Puerto Rican twist on DC slang kept me laughing even when he wasn't trying to be funny.

After a while they began talking about things that were more serious. Jerry, who seemed to be the leader, started saying he could get us kilos of cocaine for a price that seemed too good to be true. At that time, most of us would buy crack, smokeable cocaine. But everybody wanted to get their hands on straight cocaine because you could cut it—add other things to it—and either make it more powerful to the user, more desirable on the street because it was something special, or simply more profitable to you as the dealer. I knew that if I got my hands on a kilo, I would cut it with another drug to make it the best product on the streets. Once you get a reputation for having that "bomb" product, you could sell water to a whale.

As Jerry was talking I kept glancing at other guys. I was trying to read how *they* were reading *him*, and it

seemed to me like Jerry had my friends in the palm of his hand. I had been suspicious at first, but I was letting up on that since all these guys I respected for their street discernment were embracing Jerry and José. Just as I was about to give these dudes the green light of approval in my own mind, I noticed Jerry and José look at each other. It wasn't an obvious glance, but it caught my attention. The look seemed to communicate something that wasn't good. At least, not good for my friends and me. I looked around again at other guys to see if they had noticed. Everyone seemed to carry on as if it was business as usual. I didn't. I played it like I was all-in, but my radar was up, and it was pointed directly at Jerry and José.

As time went by the conversation seemed to fade into unintelligible mumbling. The more weed I smoked, the more tired I got. Eventually, I passed out. The next morning I woke up with a sharp pain in my side after sleeping in an unnatural position.

Jerry, José, and D were gone. I was groggy, both from a weed hangover and a lack of decent sleep. I scanned the room to see if anything looked odd, but it all seemed normal. I went to the back room to check if the stuff I hid the night before was still there. It was. I was relieved. Then I remembered the look that Jerry and José gave each other. I started to wonder if I was just overreacting.

I wasn't.

For most of the next several days I was out of the apartment, so I didn't see Jerry and José myself, but I knew they had been around. A week came and went. Then one day I was there with some of the other dudes

when Jerry and José came to the door. This time, D wasn't with them. I remember thinking, *Wow, it only takes a week before these guys are coming here by themselves.* I knew they had an apartment in the same complex, so it seemed pretty clear we were going to be seeing them a lot.

We were all sitting in the living room. I decided not to get high because Jerry and José were still triggering my Spidey sense. With my head clear, it just became more and more obvious to me that there was something off about these guys. I knew they weren't undercover, but I figured they were "hot" — the kind of people in the thug world who tend to draw unwanted attention to themselves, like from the police. I was a criminal, and so far a highly successful one. The last thing I wanted was to have people around who were hot.

Afternoon drifted into evening and Jerry asked us if we wanted to go to a club with him. I hated clubs because I thought they were a waste of time and money. Not to mention all the mind games you have to play to get a girl's phone number and convince her to come back to your place. You can't really talk to a girl with music blasting, anyway. If I needed a second reason not to go, it was because I was pretty sure Jerry and José were trouble. A couple of my friends said that they were going, and I thought they were stupid. Didn't they see the fakeness in Jerry and José's body language? Those dudes were hot. Running around with them could get us all locked up, or worse.

Jerry and José left, promising to come back at 8:30. As soon as that apartment door closed, I told my friends I thought they were stupid to go with these guys. For 45

minutes we argued about what we thought of them and whether we really trusted them enough to let them hang out with The Gen. We were split. As 8 p.m. rolled around, I left to run errands. When I came back an hour or so later, I was glad to see that nobody had gone with Jerry and José.

By the next morning, we were all glad.

Saturday morning. The TV on in the apartment as usual. A news flash. Live coverage. We recognize the highway, the one right next to our apartment complex. All eyes are on the TV.

A call had come in to the Maryland State Police about a suspicious-looking roll of rug on the shoulder of the road. When an officer responded to the call he noticed black hair sticking out of one end. Rolled up in the rug were three women, ages 19-25. They had been shot dead, wrapped in the rug, and dumped on the shoulder.

I had seen a lot of crazy things up to that point. I had been in shootouts, robberies, drug deals gone bad, and things I am too ashamed to mention. I thought nothing could really affect me anymore. I was wrong. We all were. Collectively, The Gen had seen enough wickedness that we were all too hard to let our emotions show. But we definitely shared in the horror of that moment as we watched the news. No one said anything for 10 minutes. I broke the silence.

“I don’t know, yung. I hope them bamas didn’t kill them three girls,” I said, shaking my head, already believing they had. Silence answered me back, but I couldn’t tell if the other dudes agreed with me. Maybe they were just in shock at how this had happened so

nearby. That's when I realized that at any moment the police were going to be all over our neighborhood, and it was not going to be routine.

We would have to shut down. The whole area was now way too hot for us to keep selling crack out of the apartment. I decided I needed to distance myself from everyone for a bit. I followed my instincts and left the apartment. A couple of days later I learned that Jerry and José had done it. They had killed those girls. Jerry told D everything that happened, and D told us.

They had gone to the club that night, met the three girls, and brought them back to their apartment, four buildings away from ours. After getting high and drinking, Jerry asked one of the girls for sex. She said no. He tried repeatedly to convince her and each time she was more forceful with her answer. Before long, all the girls demanded to be taken to their cars back at the club. Jerry and José felt disrespected. They put the girls in their van, drove away, pulled off on a dark road, and shot them. Then they wrapped the three dead girls in a rug and dumped them off on the side of highway.

The whole time I was listening to this story, I kept going back to that look that I saw them give each other in our apartment. I knew there was something about them I didn't like. I knew these dudes were trouble. I just didn't know what kind.

A month after the murders, the police were closing in on Jerry and José. Jerry was afraid of getting ratted out, so he killed José. Three months later, the police caught Jerry and charged him with the murder of all three girls.

Jerry was sent to a prison where the brother of one of the girls was housed. This guy was a “gangsta,” and that only meant one thing: the minute Jerry walked in that prison, he was as good as dead.

Bad Interpretation Can Kill You

Today, I still wonder what would have happened if I had gone to the club with Jerry and José. I may have had enough sense not to participate in all that took place that night, but it wouldn't have mattered much. I still would have been an accessory to three murders just by being with those guys. My life would be completely different; it might easily be over.

Every time I think about it, I am led back to that look that I noticed Jerry give to José. And then back to how I *interpreted* that look. I noticed something in their body language that made me distrust them, and today I attribute that perception entirely to the sovereign mercy of God.

If I had missed that look, or read it wrong, I might have missed all the other things that led me to be so cautious. I know that my interpretation of who Jerry and José were saved my life and probably some of my friend's lives. My interpretation led to application—I behaved differently because of my perceptions about what was true and what was false. This is the way it always goes. What you see, think, or feel informs what you do. If you interpret that walking down a certain street may be dangerous, then your application will probably be, *I'm not walking down that street!* Interpretation is a way of life for everyone every day.

There are many forms of interpretation. We explain, expound, judge, understand, and decipher everything around us to try to make sense of the world. We interpret a baby's cry to see if it is time to feed or time to nap. We interpret body language to see if the person we are on a date with likes us. We interpret tones of voice to know if someone is angry or not. We interpret emails and text messages based upon the person, the medium of communication, and the content. Exclamation points can be a sign of excitement or a sign of anger—depends how you interpret them.

We can't function without interpretation. We all interpret, and we all make decisions to act based on our interpretations. Those actions represent our application.

Life, in some ways, really is this simple. We are creatures who interpret everything and then act in a way that represents a response to that interpretation. This is often why we hate being confused. When you are confused, you cannot interpret events clearly, so you don't know what to do. Should you run or stay? Should you laugh or cry? Should you say yes or no? These are all questions of interpretation and application.

Interpretation and application are always linked—but they are not always *perfectly* linked. Having an accurate interpretation gives you the best start to making right application, and the better your interpretation, the more likely you are to move into proper application. What is the proverbial 20/20 hindsight, really? It's a reinterpretation of an event based on new knowledge—knowledge that could have changed our application for the better if we had had the benefit of it at first.

But it's possible—and sometimes it's easy—to have a solid interpretation and then choose the wrong application. This is the battle that we face continually as believers living in a fallen world. Based on our inheritance from Adam and Eve, we have within us a sinful nature that pulls us away from the process of right-interpretation-followed-by-right-application. Even when we rightly interpret God and his Word, sin rages within us to resist the application God requires. We often stop ourselves from recognizing truth and then applying it rightly.

This is an unseen war, and that's why we need a book to talk about it. In this book, I hope to provide a helpful and inspiring perspective on how we interpret and apply Scripture. It may be a perspective you haven't heard before.

Interpretation as Imitation

For many Christians the word “interpretation,” as it applies to the Bible, can carry some negative baggage. *Isn't that what my pastor does before he preaches? Isn't that what commentators do before they can write their books?* Not many ever say it, but it's easy to start to think that interpretation is out of your league, reserved for the few who have ascended to the heights of clarity. The rest of us are down in dumb-boy land somewhere just trying to have a thirty-minute quiet time.

We would love to know what these people know, and we esteem them for their Bible knowledge. We are impressed with their rigorous pursuit of education and imagine we don't have the time or desire to do what they've done.

And that is exactly the problem. Bible interpretation has become too exclusive.

Who comes to your mind when you think of solid Bible interpreters? Do church fathers like Chrysostom and Augustine show up? Maybe Luther, Calvin, or Spurgeon? A few contemporary heavies like Piper, Sproul, Carson, and Keller definitely top the list. You might even go hard and say the Apostle Paul—good choice.

There's something to notice here. When we think "Bible interpreters," what comes up nearly every time? Brilliance and training. Without even being aware of it, we have come to see interpretation as being joined at the hip to serious education, big-time brainpower, and a particular gift of wisdom and insight. But I want to make the case that interpreting the Bible is not primarily about education or some unusual degree of gifting. And I want to do that mainly by pointing out what we can learn about Bible interpretation from the one obvious person missing from that list above of Bible interpretation heavies.

We forgot to mention Jesus.

The greatest interpreter of God's Word by a factor of infinity is Jesus the Christ—and he has called everyone who believes to *imitate him*.

As Christians, we realize we are supposed to imitate our Savior (Ephesians 5:1). But what does that look like? We know we can't imitate his death for sins. Our dying on a cross would only accomplish a lot of pain for us. Jesus was able to atone for sin because he never sinned, so we take that one off the list. Besides that obvious exception, you could say we are called to imitate Jesus in almost every

way—it's just going to look different with us, not being members of the Trinity. Two quick examples.

Performing miracles. Jesus did a lot of extraordinary miracles. That is, he changed reality from one condition to another. Lazarus was changed from the condition of being dead to the condition of being alive. Water was changed to wine. A frightening storm became a great day for a boat ride.

Through us, sometimes in big ways and sometimes in small ways, God changes things in the world for the better all the time. Every now and then, something that a Christian does in and through Christ could probably be called a miracle, but most of the time it's just called life—a life in which God is actively involved. So that's one small way we imitate him.

Resisting Satan. Jesus went *mano a mano* with Satan in the wilderness, fighting to resist temptation. When you and I resist temptation, it usually falls a little short of an epic cosmic battle. I don't ever expect to meet the Devil personally, and I hope you don't either, but fighting against sin is another area in which we clearly are called to imitate Jesus.

The same is true with how Jesus relied on his Father, how he was devoted to prayer, how his behavior always glorified the Father, and how he did so many other things. We should try to imitate Jesus in all these areas. But on this big, complex question of imitation, let's sift things out in a slightly different way.

Jesus is the one mediator between God and man. Because of this, you might say that Jesus faces two ways

at the same time. He faces toward God the Father, and he faces toward man. He faces toward God the Father *on behalf of* man, and he faces toward man *to draw us to* God the Father. During his earthly ministry, in all the things that Jesus did with his “man” face (the miracles and the consistent prayer life and the teachings and all the rest) he was really focused on just two things: evangelism and discipleship.

Jesus spent the majority of his three years in public ministry, as recorded in the Gospels, telling people to believe in him — *evangelizing* — and teaching new believers how to live — *discipling*. In fact, everything that Jesus did in his public ministry served one of these two basic goals — the same goals he left us with in the form of the Great Commission. That’s why all believers, if we will imitate God, are called to evangelize and disciple, because when you come right down to it, this is what Jesus’ life was about. So the life of the Christian should be the same.

Yet there is more.

Evangelism and discipleship are the beginning and the end of Jesus’ ministry. What was in the middle? What I mean is: What were the means that produced the end? The answer may be simpler than you think.

Interpretation of the Word of God, spoken and applied, is the primary means that Jesus used. This is how he evangelized, and this is how he disciplined. If we strip all the miracles and teachings of Jesus down to their essence, we find Jesus interpreting God’s Word, and applying that teaching in real life. In the process, he gave us some clear insight into how all people, especially those who

believe in him, are to interpret Scripture. He left us some breadcrumbs to follow. But for many, that path has been lost—for them, interpretation of Scripture has become more about education than imitation.

The typical Christian is satisfied leaving interpretation up to his pastor, or maybe a pastor in print. There's no question that commentaries can be great tools. I use them and love them, but when I read commentaries I sometimes think, *I could never have gotten what they got from these words*. These commentators are smart and can be intimidating.

We want to understand Scripture rightly, and commentaries can help us do that, but here's the issue. Is a degree from a good Bible college, or a postgraduate education from a solid seminary, the *only* path to rightly interpreting Scripture? Do you really think that's how God set it up? Are the rest of us left paralyzed until we read some smart guy's thoughts? I think not. At least not according to Jesus. A lot of what Jesus expects us to do is *imitate him in interpreting the Bible rightly*. And for any Christian, the call of imitation will walk hand in hand with interpretation.

Be imitators of God—be interpreters, like Jesus.

Although the task will not be easy, my hope is you will find that this short book gives you a good start. We need some help because, not only do we have to deal with our own insecurities about interpreting the Bible correctly; we are surrounded by a culture of bad interpretation.

Political pundits, weathermen, stock analysts, and my fantasy football team all regularly exemplify bad interpretation of available information. It is a sign of the times

that so many of us can be wrong on a regular basis and not be embarrassed about it. As a society, we seem to be far more interested in the confident assertion of an opinion than in whether that opinion turns out to be right. We love the cocky black-and-white declarations of politicians, movie stars, columnists, activists, bloggers, and just about anybody else with a soapbox to stand on.

In 2011, some people who appear to be genuine Christians honestly thought the world was going to end. They came to this conclusion because they relied on an interpretation of Scripture taught to them by a Bible teacher named Harold Camping. Camping, who had been on the radio for 50 years, had an application of his interpretation that led to some sad and crazy stuff. On one hand, Camping put up billboards warning the end of the world, and a lot of his followers quit their jobs, gave away all their possessions, and ended up facing serious disillusionment from their faith when Judgment Day didn't cooperate and show up on schedule (twice). On the other hand, non-Christians watching this spectacle felt they now had lots of new reasons to mock Christianity. I can't blame them.

None of this would have been possible without bad interpretation, coupled with an unspoken belief among many Christians that *the interpretation of Scripture is somebody else's job*.

Before We Move On

Here at the start, let me try to clear up some potential points of confusion. I'm not trying to say that analyzing someone's interpretation and application of Scripture is

a simple thing. There are all kinds of sinful motivations bound up in why we do the things we do. None of these sins and errors are anything new:

- We can accept someone else's bad interpretation due to ignorance, confusion, misunderstanding, bad teaching, or simply by suppressing our conscience.
- We can interpret more or less rightly, and then apply wrongly.
- We often engage in a kind of interpretation without even thinking. We just react, based on, "how we are wired."
- We can even choose plain old rebellion and simply reject the authority of some or all of the Bible, but even that is a kind of bad interpretation, because when I reject Scripture, I elevate my own judgment to a place of higher authority than God's Word.

I am also not saying that getting our interpretation right will fix everything, or that right interpretation is the central purpose of Scripture, or that we can reduce Christian faith to whether we are reading a given passage accurately. But I am saying two things:

1. Without good interpretation being a big part of your routine, you cannot live as Jesus calls you to live. Not possible.
2. Interpretation should involve what others tell you and teach you about Scripture, but ending up with good interpretation is ultimately your own responsibility.

The next four chapters of this book will therefore try to make one point:

Interpretation of Scripture, followed by right application, is the primary way that we are to be like God. This is not an issue of education. It's an issue of imitation.

Jesus demonstrated *how* all believers are to interpret God's Word. We have lost sight of this precious reality and have given its responsibility over to others. Certainly the ongoing teaching of the Scriptures in the church by those called and gifted to do so is absolutely critical. That is, in fact, part of the example Jesus left us. Also, education can be helpful and should not be downplayed or undervalued. I'm simply saying that the pendulum has swung too far, and this has had serious negative implications for everyday believers. Every Christian should be able to interpret most of God's Word simply by following the pattern Jesus left us.

But before we get there, we have to see just how common and how *bad* bad interpretation really is. It is our opposition, and it awaits us.

Two

FROM THE GARDEN TO A GRAINFIELD

A Brief History of Bad Interpretation

In the movie *The Book of Eli*, Denzel Washington plays Eli, a mysterious loner nomad in a world devastated by nuclear war. Eli appears to have been given a book, and he is carrying it across what remains of the United States to a destination only he knows. At one point the book is stolen, and Eli and a younger female companion work to recover it (he gave up on the loner thing for a while—the girl was really pretty). During an intense action scene, Eli risks his life to save the girl. By this point, everyone knows that the mysterious book carried by this mysterious man is the Bible. When he is asked by the girl why he came to save her, Eli replies with what he learned from the Bible. “You gotta do unto others what you want them to do to you. At least, that what I got out of it.”

Later in the movie, we realized that Eli has memorized *the entire Bible*. So after committing more

than 800,000 words to memory, most of those words hovering tightly around the idea of a sovereign, holy, transcendent God executing his plan to redeem mankind from a fate that would make post-nuclear devastation look like Disney World with no lines and better food, what is Eli's big takeaway truth? What did he "get out of it"? The Golden Rule.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know it's just a movie, just Hollywood playing it safe. But in that scene, art is imitating life. It's a sad depiction of how bad everyday interpretation of the Bible often is.

The Origin of Bad Interpretation

Bad interpretation of one kind or another can be seen in all acts of disobedience to the Word of God. And like anything else in creation, bad interpretation had a beginning. In fact, it's as old as mankind. At the beginning of the Bible, we are introduced to bad interpretation. At the end of the Bible, we get a glimpse of what it will be like when all traces of bad interpretation have been scrubbed away and we see and know God for who he truly is. In between, the Bible is busy exposing, confronting, and correcting bad interpretation, and then trying to identify and properly apply good interpretation. You might say that following God in his program of good interpretation and good application is the life's work of every Christian.

The stakes are high. From Adam and Eve to Harold Camping, the consequences of bad interpretation have been catastrophic. Scripture gives us explicit details of the

catastrophe, with enough evidence to put bad interpretation on trial for its life. The worst of these acts is the first of these acts — mankind’s greatest and most tragic act of misinterpretation.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:1-6)

Your interpretation controls how you live. The question that lingers in everybody’s heart — *What’s the meaning of life?* — is a question about authoritative interpretation. Before sin came into the world, you might say that the interpretive grid through which life should be viewed came completely from God. There was only one source of interpretation. This is what makes Genesis 3 so

tragic but also so interesting, because when the serpent enters the picture, God is no longer the sole source for interpreting reality.

We don't know how long Adam and Eve lived in the garden as a couple before they committed the first sin. The words move a lot faster than the events unfolded. Only God knows the timeframe, but we all know the outcome—the first time in the Bible we hear mankind interpreting God's words, they get it tragically wrong. Bad interpretation changed the course of human existence forever. God was no longer mankind's controlling reality, so he was no longer the go-to source of interpretation.

In this passage, there are essentially two interpretations: God's and Eve's, which was influenced by Satan. God's is holy, clear, accurate, and straightforward, while Eve's is sinful, self-serving, imprecise, and layered.

Satan begins by focusing Eve on an interpretive question: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”

Eve responds by misquoting God. This was the first instance of bad interpretation. Eve claims that “God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” The problem is, God never said that exactly. Misquoting may be the most crude and blatant form of misinterpretation, but it is misinterpretation just the same. What God actually said is “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17). God didn't tell them not to

touch the tree, and he certainly didn't say that touching it *would result in death*, the same penalty as if they ate from it.

Satan comes back with two lies. First, he tempts Adam and Eve's understanding of God's justice. When he says that God would not bring about death as a result of their disobedience, he subtly denies God's authority to punish sin and challenges God's position on what's right and what's wrong.

Satan also raises the stakes by offering the power of independent interpretation. When Satan said, "you will be like God, knowing good and evil," he offered Adam and Eve a false power of interpretation. In street terms, he flunked 'em. He offered them a horrible interpretation of God, knowing that at the very least the consequences would be grave.

It's not clear how much Satan knew about what would happen if they ate the fruit. But it is clear that he knew God. He knew that what God says, God does, yet he offered them a bad interpretation of the Creator and of their role as the created. What is wild is that everything Satan offered to Adam and Eve, they already had. They were *already like God* (he had made them in his image, Genesis 1:26) and they *already had everything they needed to know about good and evil*.

Do you remember what God had said repeatedly about creation? He had declared all of it good. In that garden, it was clear that God was good, his creation was good, and obeying him was good. Anything outside that circle was not good; it was evil.

So Satan tempted Adam and Eve to sin by serving up a dual misinterpretation of what God had spoken: he questioned God's justice, and he questioned the sufficiency of God's definition of good and evil, right and wrong.

There's a lesson here that applies to most instances of interpretation. Adam and Eve trusted not only the serpent's interpretation (of God's words), but also their own interpretation (of Satan's claims). They had to trust *themselves* in determining that *the serpent* was right and God was wrong. They trusted their own ability to choose between one interpretation and another. In fact, before Eve ever reached out for the fruit, man had already assumed the "like God" authority to choose between right and wrong.

Who Gets to Choose?

The first sin was an arrogance of interpretation. Ever since, mankind has suffered a continual plague of arrogance — the arrogance to act on our own view of what's good and what isn't. Adam and Eve chose to take upon themselves a false authority to interpret right from wrong. You and I regularly choose to act on the basis of that same false authority. In a way, we really have become like God, but it's a cheap, shabby imitation.

This issue of authority — what is good, what is evil, and who gets to decide between the two — is a dangerous one. Ultimately what's at stake is a true or a false understanding of God's Word. Whenever we add to or disregard God's Word, we are in essence saying that we

have authority over God himself and are the sole arbiters of truth.

Typically, we all interpret and apply to our own benefit. (That's why there are always three sides to every story: your side, my side, and God's side.) When we benefit from our interpretation it is hard to change. Not because change is hard. Change in and of itself is not hard. *Desire to change* is what's hard. Most people don't desire to interpret things differently—they don't want change—if they believe they are benefitting from a wrong interpretation. Like Eve, we believe the serpent's spin. We believe that the consequences of our sinful actions will not be as bad as God has said they will be. It's basically the same deception and the same bad interpretation over and over again.

Our interpretation defines our functional reality. God as Interpreter defined reality for Adam and Eve prior to the Fall. No competing passions, no conflicting purposes. But that grid did not vanish along with Adam and Eve's sinlessness. It still exists, still applies, and still fundamentally affects who we are today. This perfect interpretive grid is not always easy to discern, but it is still Truth. As we will see later in this book, this is why Jesus taught right interpretation and application of God's Word as the primary means to accomplish his mission to save.

Variations on a Theme

Let's learn from a few more examples of bad interpretation. First, we will look at how Saul folded under pressure. Then, we will see how Satan specializes in taking God's

Word out of context. Finally, we will move to Exhibit A, the robed superheroes of bad interpretation, the League of the Extraordinarily Deceived—that’s right, the Pharisees.

Saul the King

Chapters 10 through 15 of First Samuel show both the reality of bad interpretation and its consequences. Israel rejects God as their king, preferring someone they can see. They want a king who resembles the rulers of the surrounding nations more than they want to be ruled by the King who created those nations.

God grants their requests and, through the prophet Samuel, chooses Saul. But Saul’s obedience would imitate Adam’s arrogance. His fall from grace reveals his misinterpretation of that grace.

After Saul is chosen as king, Samuel says these words to him: “Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do” (1 Samuel 10:8). These instructions were given in the context of other events which, taken together, proved that Saul had been chosen by God to be the King of Israel, and that God was using Samuel as his spokesman.

For a while, everything is peachy. Saul begins to have great military victories against Israel’s most feared opponents. In chapter 13, Saul and his son Jonathan take a small band of soldiers to a Philistine outpost, attack it, and defeat the Philistines easily. The nation of Israel celebrates the victory, gathering around Saul as he blows a horn of

triumph. But when the Philistines gather a massive army to retaliate against Israel, the Israelites panic and scatter, every man for himself.

Following Samuel's instructions, Saul goes to Gilgal. He waits there seven days for Samuel, just as he was told. But the seventh day comes and goes, and what Saul expected to happen does not take place: Samuel does not come to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings to God on Saul's behalf. Implicit in those offerings would be God blessing Saul, and thus the nation of Israel in a time of crisis, but Samuel is nowhere to be found and the army of the Philistines approaches like "the sand on the seashore in multitude" (1 Samuel 13:5).

Saul is terrified. He begins rehearsing what the prophet Samuel said he would do. He looks around frantically, hoping Samuel will appear. Seconds feel like hours. The Philistines are ready for an all-out assault against the Jews, and getting so close Saul can almost smell them. Israel's confidence is collapsing, so Saul decides to act.

Saul takes the offerings and presents them to the Lord. As Saul finishes, Samuel approaches, and he is not happy.

Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering." And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly.

You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.” (1 Samuel 13:11-13)

This instance of poorly interpreting God’s Word mirrors Genesis 3. Before Saul could come to a place of sin, he had to convince himself that what he was about to do was more right than it was wrong. He had to convince himself that he had a “good reason” for what he was about to do, even though he was clearly going against God’s instructions.

We don’t know Saul’s thoughts exactly. We don’t know all the details of his internal struggle. But we do know that he had to force himself to do something that at first seemed like a really bad idea. Saul had come to an interpretation of God’s word that opened the door for him to disobey it.

The exact nature of Saul’s sin isn’t entirely clear. Some say it was connected to 1 Samuel 10:8 and the fact that only priests had the authority to offer those sacrifices to God. Some think it was another command unrecorded in the Bible. Both are possible. In either case, the issue of Saul dismissing Samuel’s word to wait for him was bad—so bad that it would cost him his kingship.

Underneath every act of sin is a wrong interpretation of God’s Word. And that wrong view led Saul to sin against God. We’ll come back to Saul later, but for now let’s consider another misinterpretation of God’s Word.

Satan

To me, right after Adam and Eve's failure, the second worst display of interpretation in Scripture, and perhaps in history, is Satan tempting Jesus. Yep, that old serpent is back, and in Matthew 4 we see that Satan knows God's Word. He knows it better than you or I or your favorite theologian. He probably has it memorized in every human language, including those that don't even have the Bible yet. And I guarantee you his understanding of it runs a lot deeper than Denzel's Eli character spouting the Golden Rule.

Satan knows the Bible as well as he does not out of reverence for God, but so he can mess with our heads, just like he tried with Jesus in the wilderness. Satan is very good at tempting us with bad interpretations of God's Word, and in Matthew 4, we see how he does it.

This scene is ironic when you take into account who is talking to whom. Satan uses God's Word to try to tempt the very Word of God himself! That's just crazy, but it shows how off the hook our Enemy can be sometimes.

In trying to get Jesus, or us, to interpret God's Word wrongly, one of the biggest wrenches in Satan's toolbox involves taking God's Word out of context. In Matthew 4 we read about Satan making three such efforts to tempt Jesus into sin. In one of these, Satan tries to use Scripture to get Jesus to obey him. Quoting from Psalm 91:11-12, the Devil urges Jesus to throw himself off of the temple:

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If

you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” (Matthew 4:5-6)

Here, Satan reminds Jesus of the Scripture by quoting it, without taking into account the whole counsel of God. Jesus is unimpressed, to say the least. Even after 40 days in the desert without food and water, he still has enough game to know that Satan is playing to foul.

Because Jesus knows the whole counsel of God, he exposes Satan’s interpretation for what it really is: “Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test”’” (4:7). Game clock reads 00:00. It’s over. The Devil just doesn’t know it yet.

Wrong interpretation is all over the pages of Scripture, but Adam, Eve, Saul, and Satan are just a few of the culprits. There is a lot more room on the bad interpretation train, and the Pharisees are walking the aisles collecting tickets stubs.

The Pharisees

Throughout the earthly life of Jesus, no one had the interpretation of God’s Word more backwards than the Pharisees. These were the pastors of their day (no offense—I’m a pastor myself). They were highly respected and often feared, and they seemed to crave both responses. The Pharisees were supposedly the “Back to the Bible” guys, but they ended up going far beyond the Bible.

These men had been entrusted to interpret and

explain God's Word. Each week in the Synagogue, Pharisees would read and interpret the Law and the Prophets to the children of Abraham. They would take a text, read it aloud, and offer some perspective on it. But the legacy of the Pharisees is that the perspective they offered on Scripture ended up becoming a set of legalistic rules. Then, in effect, the Pharisees turned those rules around and used them to reinterpret Scripture, so that the typical Israelite understood the Bible to be all about legalism.

That same tendency to look at the Bible, interpret it wrongly, then pivot back around and see Scripture in the light of your own false interpretation is at the heart of the legalism that has plagued God's people from the very beginning.

The Law of Moses was given *by* God to reveal humanity's inability to *obey* God. The way the Israelites throughout their history had consistently turned away from God rather than to him was a proof-positive, spiritual DNA match proving their guilt. Rebellion became the Israelites' identity. Judgment became their daily condition.

What's astonishing is that the Pharisees didn't get this at all. The ones who had been entrusted to interpret the Old Testament to the people for whom it was written completely failed to grasp the fundamental underlying point. (Which, ironically, only further proves that point.)

Not only did the Pharisees believe it possible to keep the Law, they thought it was an act of faithfulness to God to add more rules to it! Even worse, these men had the

amazing talent of telling others what to do without doing it themselves. In addition to interpreting much of the Mosaic law badly, the Pharisees went a step further and pretended other parts of the law just weren't there. Bad interpretation combined with selective observation and application put these men in a league of hypocrisy all by themselves. When Jesus came, he took a look at that league and decided to call some new plays. He didn't just change the rules. He changed the whole game.

Here was a group of men in control of telling God's chosen people how they should read and interpret and obey the Word of God. They managed to construct a system that exalted themselves, oppressed the people, misrepresented God, obscured the truth of the Scriptures, and locked out any possibility of opposition. No wonder Jesus was out to expose them.

Not surprisingly, given the role of the Pharisees as supposed Keepers of Truth, the conflicts Jesus had with them were fundamentally about interpretation. Actions come from understanding. Application follows interpretation. The Pharisees knew this as well as Jesus did. So the fundamental conflict between them was that the Pharisees expected Jesus to act more like them, and Jesus expected the Pharisees to act more like God.

The specific conflicts that Jesus had with the Pharisees can seem distant to us because we're not from the culture of second-temple Judaism. At times I have had no idea what Jesus and the Pharisees are talking about. It's hard to relate to the details of their arguments, but it's easy to relate to the underlying battle of interpretation.

Matthew 12:1-14 contains two great examples. In each case, the question of interpretation involves what is lawful to do on the Sabbath and what isn't. But the real issue is who has the authority to interpret Scripture and how and why. It's obvious here that Jesus is setting up opportunities for the Pharisees to make their case for legalism so that he can then turn around and speak truth into the situation.

Here are the two questions addressed in this passage:

- If you are walking through a grainfield on the Sabbath, does the Mosaic law permit you to pluck some heads of grain and eat as you walk along?
- If someone is suffering physically, and it's the Sabbath, does the Mosaic law give you permission to try to make the person better?

The Pharisees thought the answer to both questions was no. But they didn't base their answer to either question on what the Mosaic law actually said about the Sabbath specifically or what it taught about the nature and purpose of the Sabbath generally. Jesus does, though. He mentions a few Old Testament passages and throws in a bomb about how he has all authority over the Sabbath anyway. Jesus is the great interpreter. He gets to the heart of God's Word.

But that wasn't good enough for the Pharisees. Maybe they worried that they would fail miserably at keeping God's law, or maybe they really thought they understood God's law better than anyone else, so they

drew up lists that “explained” what people must or must not do in order to be righteous. The Pharisees’ interpretation became, in effect, the “word of God” because it was what people believed God wanted them to do, while the actual Word of God was set aside.

Preparing to Meet the Interpreter

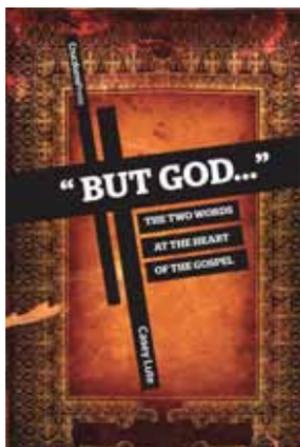
Have you ever wondered why the Gospels give so much attention to the Pharisees? Is it so whenever Christians get together we can talk about how bad they were without actually gossiping? I don’t think so. The New Testament lessons about the Pharisees are so we can take to heart the fact that we are not very different from them.

Interpretation is how we do life every moment of every day. The most important kind of interpretation is what we understand the content, authority, and purpose of the Bible to be, and therefore who we understand God to be. But just like the Pharisees, *we can all tend to rely on our interpretation of those things more than we rely on the Bible itself.*

Interpretation is not the same as knowing what the Bible says. As part of their training, the Pharisees committed to memory much of the Old Testament, and they still got it horribly wrong. In failing to understand the Old Testament accurately, the Pharisees failed to understand God accurately — and this, ultimately, is the greatest danger of false interpretation.

Like a TV weatherman who has been consistently wrong for the last month but still comes on air with a big

smile and lots of confidence, we can act like self-assured dummies about our interpretation of Scripture. But we don't have to do that any longer. Despite all the bad interpretation everywhere around us, there is room to rejoice. The Son of God, the Interpreter himself, has come, and he teaches us how to interpret his Word correctly. We do not need to be in theological darkness about the Bible. The interpretive grid that was lost in the Garden of Eden is still available to us. God the Son has come that we might regain a right understanding of God, a right relationship to God, and right interpretation of his holy Word.



[“But God...”](#)

The Two Words at the Heart of the Gospel

by Casey Lute

**Just two words.
Understand their use in Scripture,
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“A refreshingly concise, yet comprehensive biblical theology of grace that left this reader more in awe of the grace of God.”

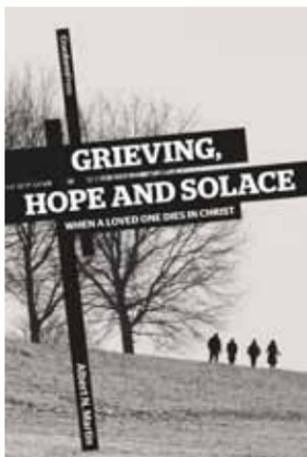
Aaron Armstrong, *BloggingTheologically.com*

“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

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by Albert N. Martin

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

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there.**

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“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.”

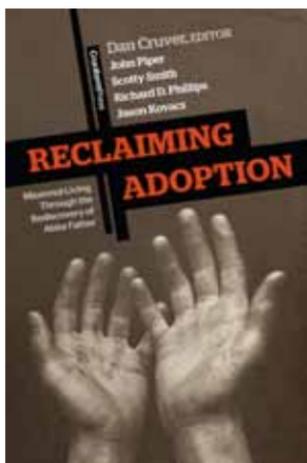
Steve Lawson, Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Mobile, AL

“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.”

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[Reclaiming Adoption](#)

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John Piper, Scotty Smith
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“The authors writing here are some of the most fearless thinkers and activists in the Christian orphan care movement. Read. Be empowered. And then join Jesus for the orphans of the world.”

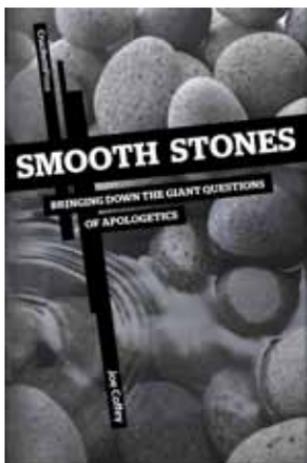
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[Smooth Stones](#)

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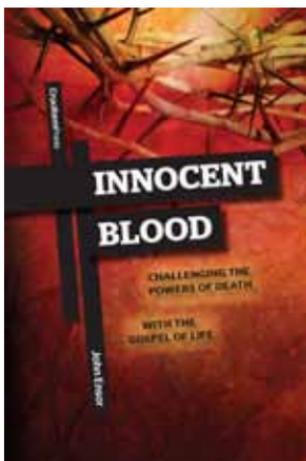
Jared Totten, Critical Thinking Blog

“A quick read that packs a punch...I'm always on the lookout for something like this. *Smooth Stones* is a winner.”

Mike del Rosario, ApologeticsGuy.Com

“Most books on apologetics are too long, too deep, and too complicated. This book has none of these defects. Like its title, it is like a smooth stone from David's apologetic sling directed right to the mind of an enquiring reader”

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John Ensor

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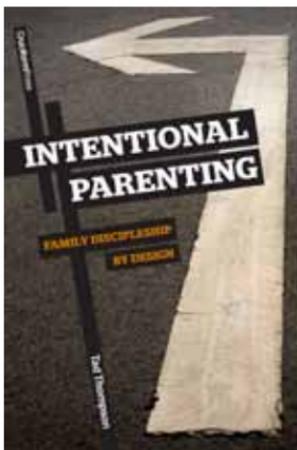
John Frame, Professor, Reformed Theological Seminary

“By showing how our activism is to be motivated and fueled by the gospel, Ensor challenges us to devote our lives to magnifying Jesus Christ through seeking justice for the unborn.”

Trevin Wax, author, editor at LifeWay Christian Resources

Stellar! John Ensor provides a bridge between the defense of innocent human life and the proclamation of the gospel. His concisely worded thesis is theologically grounded and philosophically sound. I wholeheartedly recommend this book!

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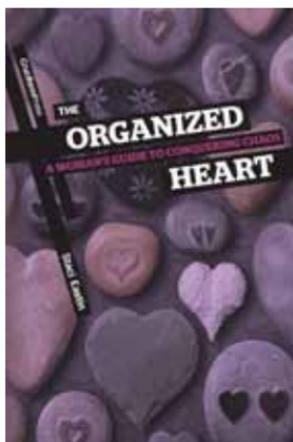
***Kevin Ezell, President, North American Mission Board,
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“Here is a practical page-turner that encourages fathers to engage the hearts of their families with truth and grace. In an age when truth is either ignored or despised, it is refreshing to see a book written for ordinary fathers who want their families to be sanctified by the truth. Thompson writes with a grace which reminds us that parenting flows from the sweet mercies of Christ..”

***Joel Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theological
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“Need an introductory text to the topic of discipling children? Here is a clear, simple book on family discipleship, centered on the gospel rather than human successes or external behaviors.”

***James M. Hamilton, Associate Professor of Biblical
Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary***



[The Organized Heart](#)

A Woman's Guide to Conquering Chaos

by Staci Eastin

Disorganized?

You don't need more rules, the latest technique, or a new gadget.

This book will show you a different, better way. A way grounded in the grace of God.

“Staci Eastin packs a gracious punch, full of insights about our disorganized hearts and lives, immediately followed by the balm of gospel-shaped hopes. This book is ideal for accountability partners and small groups.”

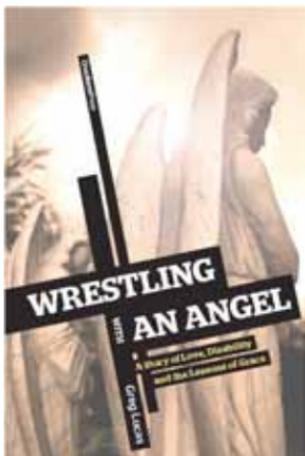
Carolyn McCulley, blogger, filmmaker, author of Radical Womanhood and Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye?

“Unless we understand the spiritual dimension of productivity, our techniques will ultimately backfire. Find that dimension here. Encouraging and uplifting rather than guilt-driven, this book can help women who want to be more organized but know that adding a new method is not enough.”

Matt Perman, Director of Strategy at Desiring God, blogger, author of the forthcoming book, What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done

“Organizing a home can be an insurmountable challenge for a woman. The Organized Heart makes a unique connection between idols of the heart and the ability to run a well-managed home. This is not a how-to. Eastin looks at sin as the root problem of disorganization. She offers a fresh new approach and one I recommend, especially to those of us who have tried all the other self-help models and failed.”

Aileen Challies, Mom of three, and wife of blogger, author, and pastor Tim Challies



[Wrestling with an Angel](#)

A Story of Love, Disability
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by Greg Lucas

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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!”

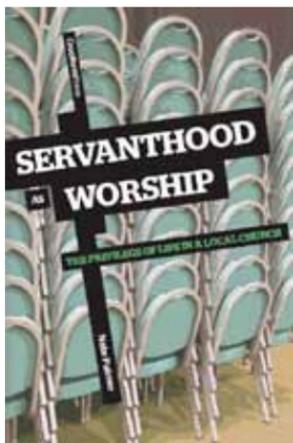
Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends International

“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



[Servanthood as Worship](#)

The Privilege of Life in a Local Church

by Nate Palmer

We [serve] because he first [served] us. - 1 John 1:19 [sort of]

What ever happened to servanthood? Here is a biblical presentation of our calling to serve in the church, motivated by the grace that is ours in the gospel.

“In an age where the church can be likened to Cinderella - beautiful, but largely ignored and forgotten - Nate Palmer’s brief book forces us to rethink both the church and our relationship to her. In an age where egocentrism ensures we sing, ‘O say, can you see - what’s in it for me?’ on a weekly basis, Palmer forces us to say instead, ‘How can I best serve the church?’ Looking at the needs of others rather than one’s own is possibly the most serious deficiency in the church today. Reading this book will help redress the deficiency. I heartily recommend it.”

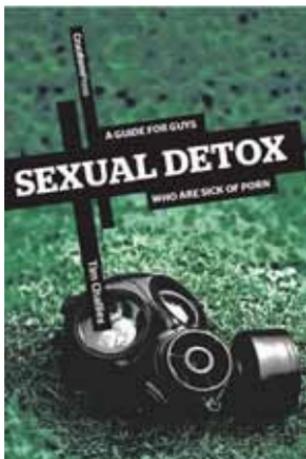
***Derek W.H. Thomas, Professor of Theology
Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson)***

“Think of these pages as a handbook. It contains a sustainable, practical vision for serving in the local church that is powered by grace. Along the way, you’ll get a mini theological education.”

Justin Buzzard, pastor, San Francisco Bay Area, Buzzard Blog

“In our media-crazed, me-first culture, the art of the basin and the towel has been shoved off onto those who get paid to serve - certainly a call to serve in humility can’t be God’s will for all of us, or could it? Nate Palmer gets at the heart of our resistance. I strongly recommend this book.”

Elyse Fitzpatrick, author of Because He Loves Me



[Sexual Detox](#)

A Guide for Guys Who Are Sick of Porn

by Tim Challies

"In an age when sex is worshiped as a god, a little book like this can go a long way to helping men overcome sexual addiction."

**-Pastor Mark Driscoll
Mars Hill Church
Acts 29**

"Online pornography is not just a problem for Christian men; it is THE problem. Many men, young and old, in our churches need *Sexual Detox*. Challies offers practical, doable and, above all, gospel-centered hope for men. I want every man I serve and all the guys on our staff to read this book."

Tedd Tripp, Pastor, and author of *Shepherding a Child's Heart*

"Tim Challies strikes just the right balance in this necessary work. His assessment of the sexual epidemic in our culture is sober but not without hope. His advice is practical but avoids a checklist mentality. His discussion of sexual sin is frank without being inappropriate. This book will be a valuable resource."

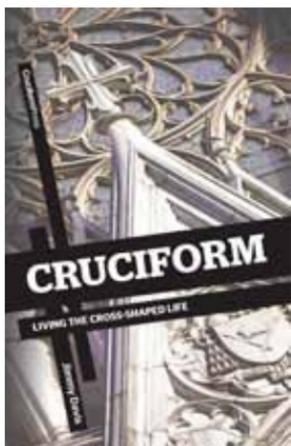
Kevin DeYoung, Pastor and author

"Thank God for using Tim to articulate simply and unashamedly the truth about sex amidst a culture of permissiveness. Read it and believe it."

Ben Zobrist, Tampa Bay Rays

"*Sexual Detox* is just what we need. It is clear, honest, and biblical, written with a tone that is knowing but kind, exhortative but gracious, realistic but determined. We have been given by Tim Challies a terrific resource for fighting sin and exalting Christ.

Owen Strachan, Boyce College



[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

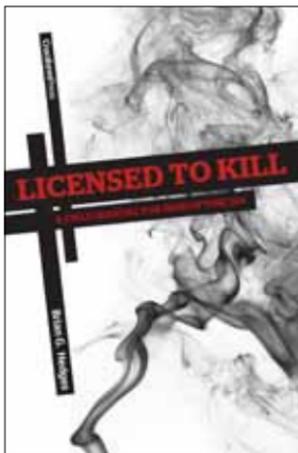
“

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



[Licensed to Kill](#)

A Field Manual for Mortifying Sin

by Brian G. Hedges

Your soul is a war zone.

Know your enemy.

Learn to fight.

“A faithful, smart, Word-centered guide.”

- **Wes Ward, Revive Our Hearts**

“Are there things you hate that you end up doing anyway? Have you tried to stop sinning in certain areas of your life, only to face defeat over and over again? If you’re ready to get serious about sin patterns in your life—ready to put sin to death instead of trying to manage it—this book outlines the only strategy that works. This is a book I will return to and regularly recommend to others.”

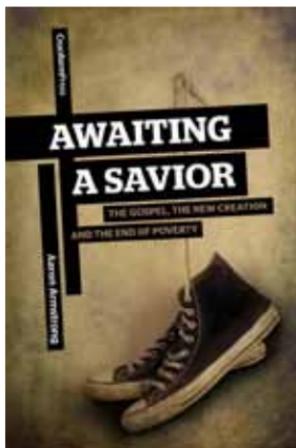
Bob Lepine, Co-Host, FamilyLife Today

“Brian Hedges shows the importance of fighting the sin that so easily entangles us and robs us of our freedom, by fleeing to the finished work of Christ every day. Well done!”

Tullian Tchividjian, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church; author, Jesus + Nothing = Everything

“Rather than aiming at simple moral reformation, *Licensed to Kill* aims at our spiritual transformation. Like any good field manual, this one focuses on the most critical information regarding our enemy, and gives practical instruction concerning the stalking and killing of sin. This is a theologically solid and helpfully illustrated book that holds out the gospel confidence of sin’s ultimate demise.”

Joe Thorn, pastor and author, Note to Self: The Discipline of Preaching to Yourself



[Awaiting a Savior](#)

The Gospel, the New Creation and the End of Poverty

by Aaron Armstrong

Christians are called to serve the poor generously, joyfully, by grace, to the glory of God.

But eliminating poverty is a misguided and dangerous goal.

Poverty is rooted in the fall of man, and there is only one Savior.

“Challenging our own idolatry, our own motivations, and our own actions, *Awaiting a Savior* reorients our mercy ministry around the gospel, seeking to show how a life of love is the overflow of a grace-filled heart.”

Trevin Wax, author, editor at Lifeway Christian Resources

“Aaron Armstrong is rightly pessimistic about humanistic solutions, brightly optimistic about God’s ultimate solution, and practically realistic about the best and most the Church can do in this present age.”

Dr. David P. Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“*Awaiting a Savior* gets at the real but often overlooked cause of poverty. It is a solid theological treatment of what poverty really stems from and how to see it within a biblical framework.”

Pastor Dave Kraft, Mars Hill Church, Orange County, author

“Finally, a book that tackles the subject of poverty in a biblical, balanced, thought-provoking, and convicting manner! Walks the fine line of calling for a biblical solution to poverty without causing the reader to feel overly burdened with unnecessary, unbiblical guilt. Aaron also shows how biblical generosity is ultimately rooted in the generosity of God himself.”

Stephen Altrogge, pastor, author, TheBlazingCenter.com



[Getting Back in the Race](#)

The Cure for Backsliding

by Joel R. Beeke

Backsliding is the worst thing that can happen to anyone claiming faith in Jesus.

Find out why. Learn the diagnosis. Experience the cure.

“This book is a masterpiece, and I do not say that lightly. This excellent work, so helpfully spiced with quotations from the Puritans, needs to be read over and over again. I heartily commend it.”

Martin Holdt, Pastor; editor, Reformation Africa South

“Joel Beeke’s characteristic clarity, biblical fidelity, and unflinching care as to detail and pastoral wisdom is obvious on every page. This book is an honest and sometimes chilling exposition of the seriousness of backsliding; at the same time, it unfailingly breathes the air of grace and hope. Timely and judicious.”

Derek W.H. Thomas, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC; Editorial Director, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

“Don’t settle for being a spiritual shrimp,’ argues Dr. Beeke. The pity is that too many modern Christians are opting for shrimpishly small degrees of grace. Indwelling sin drags the careless believer down into guilty backsliding. This book is a prescription for the believer who feels his guilt.”

Maurice Roberts, former editor, Banner of Truth magazine

“Dr. Beeke outlines the best means of bringing balm and healing to the backslidden soul. Highly recommended.”

Michael Haykin, Professor, Southern Baptist Theo. Sem.