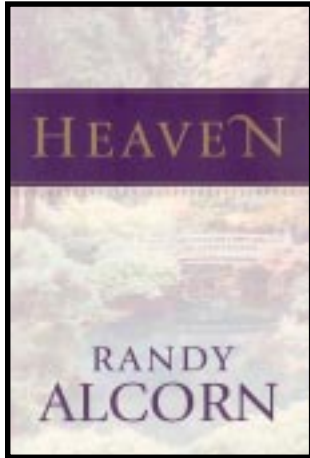




Eternal Perspectives

We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen...



Heaven: Dreading It or Anticipating It? by Randy Alcorn

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare called what lies beyond death “the undiscovered country.” People have given much thought to this country—and adopted remarkably different attitudes toward it.

Three centuries ago Jonathan Edwards wrote, “My mind was very much taken up with contemplations on heaven, and the enjoyments of those there.” He reasoned that since “happiness is the highest end of the creation of the universe...how happy may we conclude will be those intelligent beings that are to be made eternally happy!”

James Gilmour, missionary to Mongolia, his health deteriorating, wrote in his journal in 1889, “Heaven is ahead...hurrah!”

These exuberant views of Heaven provide a stark contrast to most people’s attitudes—even those who are Christians.

Sir Walter Scott dreaded having to endure “an eternity of music.” Lloyd George admitted, “When I was a boy, the thought of Heaven used to frighten me more than the thought of hell. I pictured Heaven as a place where time would be perpetual Sundays, with perpetual services from which there would be no escape.”¹

A pastor confessed to me, “Whenever I think about Heaven, it makes me depressed. I’d rather just cease to exist when I die.”

“Why?” I asked.

“I can’t stand the thought of that endless tedium. To float around in the clouds with nothing to do but

strum a harp...it’s all so terribly boring. Heaven doesn’t sound much better than hell. I’d rather be annihilated than spend eternity in a place like that.”

Where did this Bible-believing, seminary-educated pastor get such a view of Heaven? Certainly not from Scripture, where Paul said to depart and be with Christ was “far better” than staying on earth (Philippians 1:23). Yet, though my friend was more honest about it than most, I’ve found many Christians share the same misconceptions about Heaven.

Our Mark Twain View of Heaven

When an English vicar was asked by a colleague what he expected after death, he replied, “Well, if it comes to that, I suppose I shall enter into eternal bliss, but I really wish you wouldn’t bring up such depressing subjects.”²

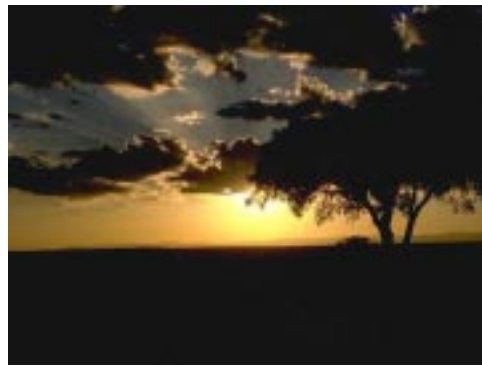
I’ve written about Heaven. I’ve received thousands of letters and had hundreds of conversations concerning Heaven. I’ve had countless appointments and phone calls about it. I taught a seminary course, “A Theology of Heaven.” I’ve spoken about Heaven at churches and conferences. There’s a great deal I don’t know...but if there’s one thing I *do* know, it’s what people think about Heaven. And I’m frankly alarmed. Not simply because of ignorance, but the harmful misconceptions held by many believers.

A *Far Side* cartoon captures these misconceptions. A man with angel wings and a halo sits on a cloud, doing nothing, with no one nearby. He has

the expression of someone marooned on a desert island, with absolutely nothing to do. A caption shows his inner thoughts: “Wish I’d brought a magazine.”

Poetry about Heaven has tended to be mystical and,

often, sappy. It rarely captures the biblical portrayals of a New Earth with a great capital city made with precious stones, having specific dimensions, and containing trees, rivers, and resurrected people coming in and out of the gates, engaged in meaningful relationships and productive activity. Our unbiblical assumptions that Heaven won’t be a real earthly place blinds us to what Scripture actually says. It’s made countless Christians vulnerable to a Mark Twain view of Heaven.



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D. L. Moody said, "Soon you will read in the newspaper that I am dead. Don't believe it for a moment. I will be more alive than ever before."

Twain said in *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, "There is no humor in heaven." He said, "You take heaven. I'd rather go to Bermuda."

Huck Finn lived with the Christian spinster Miss Watson. She attacked his fun-loving spirit. Huck says,

She went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it...I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, 'not by a considerable sight.' I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.³

What would have attracted Huck Finn was a place where he could do pleasurable things with enjoyable people. Miss Watson, the supposed Christian, had nothing to say about Heaven that appealed to Huck. And nothing to say about Heaven which, if we're honest, appeals to *any* of us!

Do I mean that we should invent notions about Heaven that sound good even though they're untrue? No. Had Miss Watson told Huck what the Bible says of living in a resurrected body and being with people you love on a resurrected earth with land and rivers and adventures, *that* would have gotten his attention!

When it came to Heaven and hell, Mark Twain never "got it." He was a charming writer, but a poor theologian. Under the weight of age, he said in his autobiography,

"The burden of pain, care, misery grows heavier year by year. At length ambition is dead, pride is dead, vanity is dead, longing for release is in their place. It comes at last—the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them—and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence; where they achieved nothing; where they were a mistake and a failure and a foolishness."⁴

What a contrast to his contemporary Charles Spurgeon's perspective: "To come to Thee is to come home from exile, to come to land out of the raging storm, to come to rest after long labour, to come to the goal of my desires and the summit of my wishes."



The apostle Paul was one of the greatest minds of the first century. He said, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:21).

Voltaire, an atheist alarmed at the prospect of death, wrote: "I wish I had never been born."

Is living forever in the presence of God, in the place made for you, the goal of your desires and the summit of your wishes? Or have you adopted Mark Twain's sad caricature of Heaven, devoid of the biblical teaching of a resurrected life on a resurrected earth?

Darkness...or Better by Far?

Bertrand Russell has been called the greatest mind of the twentieth century. Anticipating his death he said, "There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendor, no vastness anywhere; only triviality for a moment, and then nothing."⁵

Near the end he was so afraid of death that he said to his doctor, "I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six more months of life."⁶

Evangelist D. L. Moody said, "Soon you will read in the newspaper that I am dead. Don't believe it for a moment. I will be more alive than ever before."

Beside his deathbed, Moody's son recorded his father's last words in this world: "Earth recedes, heaven opens before me!"⁷

No matter what he says while he's still healthy, when he dies, no sane man wants to be Twain, Russell or Voltaire. He wants to be Paul, Spurgeon or Moody.

Our Terminal Vagueness about Heaven

Besides the Bible itself, the most influential book on Heaven ever written was by a Puritan pastor, published in 1649. It contained 460,000 words, which today would be about 1500 pages. Richard Baxter said this in *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*:

"If there be so certain and glorious a rest for the saints, why is there no more industrious seeking after it? One would think, if a man did but once hear of such unspeakable glory to be obtained, and believed what he heard to be true, he should be transported with the vehemency of his desire after it, and should almost forget to eat and drink, and should care for nothing else, and speak of and inquire after

nothing else, but how to get this treasure. And yet people who hear of it daily, and profess to believe it as a fundamental article of their faith, do as little mind it, or labor for it, as if they had never heard of any such thing, or did not believe one word they hear."

The answer may be that the Heaven portrayed has not been so glorious. We have failed to believe or understand what the Bible says about Heaven. Therefore, it has not consumed our imaginations...or shaped our lives.

A 2003 Barna Research poll concluded, "An overwhelming majority of Americans continue to believe that there is life after death and that Heaven and hell exist."⁸ Nearly two-thirds believe they are Heaven-bound, and only one-half of 1% think they are hell-bound. What people actually believe about Heaven and hell varies widely. A Barna Research spokesperson said, "They're cutting and pasting religious views from a variety of different sources—television, movies, conversations with their friends." The result is a highly individualistic theology of the afterlife, usually without biblical substantiation. Even in churches there's widespread ignorance of the doctrine of heaven.

Novelist John Updike tells the story of a fourteen-year-old boy named David. When it's time for questions in his catechism class, David looks to his pastor for answers:

"I asked Reverend Dobson about Heaven and he said it was like Abraham Lincoln's goodness living after him."



"And why didn't you like it?"

"Well, don't you see? It amounts to saying there isn't any Heaven at all."

"I don't see that it amounts to that. What do you want Heaven to be?"

"Well, I don't know. I want it to be something. I thought he'd tell me what it was."⁹

We all want Heaven to be something. The Bible teaches it *is* something. Yet when it's spoken of so vaguely by Christian leaders, who speak so clearly about other aspects of life, it appears to us—as it did to David—that Heaven amounts to nothing at all.

How many ministers have said at funerals, "He will live on in our memories"? What that really suggests is that though we might remember him, he will not live on. The Bible teaches that when we die, Christians will live on in Christ's presence, awaiting the greatest day in the history of the universe—the resurrection of people and the universe, where we will live on forever as real people on a real earth.

Few people, however, really seem to believe this. "Scientific, philosophical, and theological skepticism has nullified the modern Heaven and replaced it with teachings that are minimalist, meager, and dry."¹⁰

Speaking of our failure to understand Heaven, J. C. Ryle said, "Vagueness and dimness of perception are the defect of weak believers. They do not see clearly what they believe and why they believe."¹¹

Heaven was once an elementary teaching in which believers were solidly trained. This is no longer the case. Vagueness and dimness characterize our modern view of Heaven. We, our children, our churches, and our culture are thereby impoverished.

Our Deeply Ingrained Misconceptions

John Eldredge says,

Nearly every Christian I have spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service...we have settled on an image of the never-ending singalong in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and ever, amen.... And our heart sinks. *Forever and ever? That's it? That's the good news?* And then we sigh and feel guilty that we are not more "spiritual." We lose heart, and we turn once more to the present to find what life we can.¹²

I've never met anyone who wants to be a ghost. The resurrected Jesus reassured his fearful disciples, "Touch me, I'm not a ghost." Yet we picture an afterlife in which we become ghosts—the very things his disciples were afraid of and Jesus promised he wasn't.

Our bodies and our God-given appetites and taste buds don't permit us to desire to eat gravel. Why? Because we were not made to eat gravel. Trying to



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develop an appetite for a disembodied existence in a non-physical Heaven is like trying to develop an appetite for gravel. It's not going to work. Nor should it.

What God made us to desire, and therefore what we *do* desire, is exactly what God promises to those who follow Jesus: the resurrected life in a resurrected body, with the resurrected

Christ on a resurrected earth. Our desires correspond precisely to God's plans. It's not that we want something, then engage in wishful thinking that what we want exists. It's the opposite—the reason we want it is precisely because it does or will exist. Resurrected people in a resurrected universe isn't our idea—it's God's.

¹ Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven & Hell* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 324.

² Barry Morrow, *Heaven Observed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 89.

³ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1996), 6.

⁴ Charles Ferguson Ball, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1980), 19.

⁵ Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography*, vol. 2 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), 159.

⁶ Voltaire, as quoted by J. Sidlow Baxter, *The Other Side of Death* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1987), 7.

⁷ George Sweeting and Donald Sweeting, "The Evangelist and The Agnostic," *Moody Monthly*, July/August 1989, 69.

⁸ K. Connie Kang, "Next Stop, the Pearly Gates...or Hell?," *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 2003.

⁹ John Updike, "Pigeon Feathers," in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1987), 135-138; cited by Barry Morrow, *Heaven Observed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 14-15.

¹⁰ Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 352.

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, *Heaven* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 8-9.

¹² John Eldredge, *The Journey of Desire* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 111.

Sexual Abuse Can be an Obstacle to Salvation

(Randy received the following letter from a woman attending one of his conferences. She expressed herself very well. Abuse being an obstacle to salvation, in the way she explains it, makes sense. She graciously allowed us to reprint this letter.)

I really enjoyed your message of "Truth and Grace" at the conference. It was extremely powerful. I know that you write and talk about the abortion issue a lot. There is one sensitive topic that I'm not sure has been fully addressed as a major obstacle to salvation. When I brought up the topic at a crisis pregnancy center the director saw no direct ties to abortion, sexual purity, and being violated as a child.

Becoming a Christian makes a person clean. However, if the dirtiness that a person feels is not a result of her actions then it is hard to really feel like you've been forgiven. Women scrub themselves with Christianity, as one would soap, in hopes of feeling truly clean. When the residue of dirtiness is still present, they assume that Christianity didn't work. They want to be clean, but it is hard to identify that the dirtiness was not theirs to begin with. Only true forgiveness can free them up to accept the cleanliness that comes from Christ.

This is a personal issue for me. I thought it was one that I would take to my grave. It didn't affect me in the same way it cripples others. For some wonderful reason the Lord had his hand on me at a young age. Nevertheless, when I realized that my sister—whom I love with all my heart—didn't have

a relationship with the Lord, I decided to talk with her about our past.

In reflecting on our story it reminded me of coming out of a burning building. I was singed, but thankful to be alive. But then I realized that someone I loved was still in the inferno and didn't know how to get out. In fact, she didn't know there was a fire.

It was hard to bring up our past. She didn't even remember it until we started talking. I told her how God loved her and wanted to take the dirtiness away. All she could say between the tears was, "I have already tried to be a Christian. I said the prayer over and over, read my Bible and memorized scripture. I wanted to feel clean, but no matter how hard I tried, it never worked. I still feel dirty. I thought perhaps I was already destined for hell."

Randy, sexual abuse is an obstacle to salvation. When I look out into a crowd, I know that at least one-fourth of us share the same pain. It doesn't have to be that way. People need to be told with truth and grace that God cleans all the dirt. It is so much easier to forgive ourselves of the sins we have committed. Substance abuse, promiscuous behavior, and even abortion are topics that are openly talked about. We can take ownership of problems that have been self-inflicted, but being inappropriately touched as an innocent child somehow crosses a line.

Women scrub themselves with Christianity, as one would soap, in hopes of feeling truly clean.



The Passion of Jesus Christ: Fifty Reasons Why He Came to Die by John Piper

In his heart-wrenching, innocence-shattering, mouth-shutting book *Night*, Elie Wiesel tells of his experience as a teenager with his father in the concentration camps of Auschwitz, Buna, and Buchenwald. There was always the threat of “the selection”—the taking away of the weak to be killed and burned in the ovens.

At one point—and only one—Wiesel links Calvary and the camps. He tells of an old rabbi, Akiba Dumer.

Akiba Dumer left us, a victim of the selection. Lately, he had wandered among us, his eyes glazed, telling everyone of his weakness: “I can’t go on... It’s all over...” It was impossible to raise his morale. He didn’t listen to what we told him. He could only repeat that all was over for him, that he could no longer keep up the struggle, that he had no strength left, nor faith. Suddenly his eyes would become blank, nothing but two open wounds, two pits of terror.¹

Then Wiesel makes this provocative comment: “Poor Akiba Dumer, if he could have gone on believing in God, if he could have seen a proof of God in this Calvary, he would not have been taken by the selection.”² I will not presume to put any words in Elie Wiesel’s mouth. I am not sure what he meant. But it presses the question: Why the link between Calvary and the concentration camp?

When I ask this question, I am not thinking of cause or blame. I am thinking of meaning and hope. Is there a way that Jewish suffering may find, not its cause, but its final meaning in the suffering of Jesus Christ? Is it possible to think, not of Christ’s passion leading to Auschwitz, but of Auschwitz leading to an understanding of Christ’s passion? Is the link between Calvary and the camps a link of unfathomable empathy? Perhaps only Jesus in the end can know what happened during the “one long night”³ of Jewish

suffering. And perhaps a generation of Jewish people, whose grandparents endured their own noxious crucifixion, will be able, as no others, to grasp what happened to the Son of God at Calvary. I leave it as a question. I do not know.

But this I know: Those ostensible “Christians” who built the camps never knew the love that moved Jesus Christ toward Calvary. They never knew the Christ, who instead of killing to save a culture,

died to save the world. But there are some Christians—the true Christians—who have seen the meaning of the passion of Jesus Christ, and have been broken and humbled by his suffering. Could it be that these, perhaps better than many, might be able to see and, at last, begin to fathom the suffering of Jewish people?

What an irony that Christians have been anti-Semitic! Jesus and all his early followers were Jews. People from every group in Palestine were involved in his crucifixion (not just Jews). God himself was the chief Actor in the death of his Son, so that the main question is not, Which humans brought about the death of Jesus? But, What did the death of Jesus bring about for humans—including Jews and Muslims and Buddhists and Hindus and nonreligious secularists—and all people everywhere?

This article was excerpted from the introduction to John Piper’s book, The Passion of Jesus Christ: Fifty Reasons Why He Came to Die (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), p. 15-16.

¹ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982, orig. 1960), p. 72.

² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

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“What did the
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bring about for
humans?”*

The man who is about to sail for Australia or New Zealand as a settler, is naturally anxious to know something about his future home, its climate, its employments, its inhabitants, its ways, its customs. All these are subjects of deep interest to him. You are leaving the land of your nativity, you are going to spend the rest of your life in a new hemisphere. It would be strange indeed if you did not desire information about your new abode. Now surely, if we hope to dwell for ever in that “better country, even a heavenly one,” we ought to seek all the knowledge we can get about it. Before we go to our eternal home we should try to become acquainted with it. J. C. Ryle



For nearly a quarter of a century, Joni and Friends has been dedicated to extending the love and message of Christ to people who are affected by disability.

Joni and Friends ... affecting the lives of thousands of disabled people and their families

JONI EARECKSON TADA

Founder and President of Joni and Friends

A diving accident in 1967 left Mrs. Tada a quadriplegic in a wheelchair, unable to use her hands. During two years of rehabilitation, she spent long months learning how to paint with a brush between her teeth. Her high detail fine art paintings and prints are sought after and collected.

Due to her best-selling books, beginning with her autobiography, *Joni*, as well as having visited 35 countries, Joni's first name is recognized around the world. World Wide Pictures' full-length feature film, *JONI*, in which Mrs. Tada recreated her own life, has been translated into 15 languages and shown in scores of countries around the world.

Mrs. Tada's role as a disability advocate led to a presidential appointment to the National Council on Disability for three-and-a-half years, during which time the Americans with Disabilities Act became law.

Joni and Friends was founded by Mrs. Tada in 1979 and has grown into four flagship programs that affect the lives of thousands of disabled people and their families. Joni and Friends serves over 500 special needs families through Family Retreats across the nation. Through *Wheels for the World*, over 14,000 wheelchairs have been collected nationwide, refurbished by inmates in correctional facilities, and shipped to developing nations where physical therapists fit each chair to a needy disabled child or adult. *Joni and Friends*, a daily five minute radio program, is heard over 850 broadcast outlets and this year received the "Radio Program of the Year" award from National Religious Broadcasters. Through ten Area Ministries offices, *Joni and Friends* teams provide church training and education to promote inclusion of people with disabilities.

Mrs. Tada is a highly sought-after conference speaker both in the U.S. and internationally. She is a columnist for *Moody Magazine*, the United Kingdom's *Christian Herald*, and several European Christian magazines.

Joni Eareckson Tada is the author of over 30 books. Her best-selling and award-winning works, cover topics ranging from disability outreach to reaching out to God, include: *All God's Children; A Quiet Place in a Crazy World; Diamonds in the Dust; More Precious Than Silver; Holiness in Hidden Places; and Extraordinary Faith. A Christmas Longing* includes reproductions of her best-loved Christmas paintings. *The Life and Death Dilemma* addresses the

tough issues of euthanasia and assisted suicide. She explores the nature of Heaven in *Heaven... Your Real Home. When God Weeps: Why Our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty*, is co-authored by long-time friend and mentor, Steve Estes.

Mrs. Tada and her husband Ken have been married since 1982. Mr. Tada recently retired from 32 years of teaching and has come on board with Joni and Friends to serve as Director of Ministry Development. He is also a member of the Board of Directors and recently received Family Life Ministries' Robert McQuilken Award honoring "The Courageous Love of a Marriage Covenant Keeper."

Programs and Resources

For nearly a quarter of a century, Joni and Friends has been dedicated to extending the love and message of Christ to people who are affected by disability, whether it is the disabled person, a family member, or friend. Their objective is to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of this group of people in practical ways.

Area Ministries

The strategy of fulfilling the mission of Joni and Friends is primarily based upon Area Ministries mobilizing and equipping local congregations "to do the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12) to the disabled of their city and region according to Christ's mandate in Luke 14:15-24.

Area Ministries are:

- staffed by two or more people
- made possible by local donors, churches, and volunteers
- directed by a local board and a paid Area Director, under the auspices of the national office and Director of Field Operations

Their primary work includes:

- assisting churches with training and a variety of programs, curriculum, and special projects to minister to individuals and families affected by disability
- evangelizing and discipling people affected by disability
- mobilizing volunteers and churches to participate in exciting and rewarding ministries such as Family Retreats, Wheels for the World, and Special Delivery (ministry to the institutionalized and homebound)
- providing resource referrals and assistance to individuals and families affected by disability

Christian Fund for the Disabled — Connecting Churches and People Affected by Disability

The Christian Fund for the Disabled is a matching grant program designed to meet the spiritual and practical needs of people affected by disability.

Through the fund, Joni and Friends seeks to strengthen relationships between people affected by disability and their local church.

We want to see people affected by disability involved in a warm fellowship of Christians who honor the Lord and practice what the Bible teaches.

Friends of People with Disabilities

Joni Eareckson Tada writes, "You're invited to join a growing movement of friendship with people with disabilities around the world—friendship that will bring people to Christ and transform lives forever!

"There are over 600 million people with disabilities in the world in need of a friend. That's why I'm asking you to join me in a new adventure called Friends. By becoming a Friend, you'll join a growing number of people who want to see barriers to friendship torn down and people with disabilities enjoy a new life in Christ."

Wheels for the World— Giving the Gift of Mobility with Christ's Love

The World Health Organization estimates that there is a need of over 18 million wheelchairs around the world. In some of these countries the cost of a wheelchair can equal a year's wages, resulting in the impossibility for people affected by disability to ever receive one. Living in isolation, lacking simple mobility and cut off from life, many of the disabled are also tragically cut off from the local church. As a result, many have never heard the gospel message or experienced the love of Christ.



For more information on the special programs of Joni and Friends or how to contribute to their ministry, contact them at:

Joni and Friends
PO Box 3333
Agoura Hills
CA 91376-3333
Phone: 818-707-5664
Fax: 818-707-2391
TTY: 818-707-9707
www.joniandfriends.org

(You may also give a contribution through EPM. 100% of designated contributions go directly to the ministry noted.)

EPM's Website Has Been Updated!



Check out our website:

www.epm.org

There are many new resources, articles, links, and Q & A's that may be helpful to you.



And we're updating and adding on a regular basis so keep coming back for a visit.

We hope you enjoy the new look!





Clothing also communicates a message about our values, our character, our attitudes.



What Does Your Clothing Communicate?

by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

If I tell you that there's a woman coming down this church aisle in a long, white, formal dress, what would you say is probably the occasion? It's a wedding; she's a bride. How did you know? Because clothing communicates.

If I tell you there's a teenager bundled up in a snowsuit, mittens, a wool hat and a scarf would you agree with me that the teenager is probably not on his way to a picnic?

Clothing and appearance send a message. They can communicate our occupation or an occasion we're marking. In some of the world's religions, women are clearly identifiable by their dress.

Clothing can communicate something about our socio-economic status. You can look at some people and think, "She looks like a wealthy woman." Or you might look at another woman and—purely on the basis of her clothing—say, "She doesn't look like she comes from a financially stable background."

Clothing also communicates a message about our values, our character, our attitudes. For example, you can look at the dress of some and tell that neatness is not a concern to them.

The Bible speaks of occasions when people would wear sackcloth as a sign of mourning or repentance. So, if someone was wearing sackcloth, he was sending a message about what was going on in his heart.

Scripture also indicates that clothing can send a message about our morals or the lack thereof. For example, in Proverbs 7:10 we read of the adulteress that she was "dressed as a harlot" (NASB). The woman is dressed in such a way that you can look at her and see that her motives are not pure toward this man.

In Genesis 38:13ff., we learn of a woman named Tamar, a widow who wanted to seduce a man to whom she was not married. Accordingly, she took off her widow's garments (v.14). Such garments were a specific type of clothing that would have communicated that she was a widow. Tamar, however, changed her clothes and put on the clothing of a prostitute, for the man she was trying to seduce knew her. In fact, he was her father-in-law. But when she changed her clothes, he didn't recognize who she was. He just looked at her clothes, and judging her to be a prostitute, he went in to be sexually intimate with her. Of course, I point that out not to justify him, but to demonstrate that clothing can send a powerful message.

It is just as true today that women are sending a message with their clothing. Many of them know exactly what message they're sending. Perhaps some others are naïve, having become so influenced by this culture that they don't know any other way to think about clothing.

Kim Alexis was a super-model in the eighties. Her picture was on over 500 magazine covers including *Vogue* and the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition. She's had a change of heart about many things, and today she realizes that she made a lot of mistakes. Now she's challenging women to think about the message they are sending when they dress sensually.

Here's what she has to say, "Many women are playing with fire in the way they dress. Dressing like a floozy tells the world, 'Look at me, want me, lust after me. I'm easy and you can have me.' Displaying intimate parts of the body," she says, "is a form of advertising for sex."



As women, clothing and appearance are some of the most powerful and important means we have of sending a message about our hearts and our values.

So here's the question. What do your clothes and your appearance communicate about you. What message are you sending?

As Christian women we need to ask one another, "Is the message you're sending consistent with what you really believe, or are you sending a mixed message? Are you thinking one thing in your heart, but sending a message that you don't intend or ought not to send with your outward appearance?"

I find, today, that there are a lot of women who really do have a heart for the Lord. They may be faithfully involved in a local church. And

they may be actively involved in gospel ministry. And they may lift up their hands in joyful acclamation to the Lord when singing songs of praise. And yet, many of these very same women may also be totally oblivious of the message that they are sending with their body and with their clothing.

Their clothing is communicating something far different than what's in their hearts.



Unfortunately, this issue represents an area where too many Christian women have accepted the secular world's way of thinking, with the rationalization that "Maybe it's okay so long as we just don't go to the farthest extremes."

That's why we have to go back to the Word of God and ask, "What is God's way of thinking about all this? What message should we be sending? And how can we send that message with our clothing and with our outer appearance?"

The way we think, the way we act, the choices we make, the way we relate to others, and yes, even the way we dress sends a message.

Taken from *The Look: Does God Really Care What I Wear?* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss (Copyright © 2003). Nancy is the host of *Revive Our Hearts*, a daily radio program heard on more than 230 stations.

For information on the three-week Modesty radio series by Nancy, visit www.ReviveOurHearts.com.



"I'm concerned how young women are dressing these days, especially Christian young women. What's going on?" Answer by Karina Franklin

Modesty is not a characteristic of women in our culture (and even in our churches!) And, it's not just an issue for young women, although that is a time when women often develop their habits and lifestyles. Unfortunately, there are so many moms and even grandmas who don't seem to have a grasp on the issue. The sad thing is that according to Titus 2:3-5, one of the things the older women are to teach the younger women is how to be pure (or chaste) so that the word of God will not be blasphemed. And 1 Peter 3:3-5 reminds us that



as women our beauty should not come from outward adornment, but rather of character that is honoring to God. This doesn't mean that we should be sloppy and not take care of our appearance, but that our appearance should not be our primary attractive quality.

That makes me think that immodest dressing is in some ways a shortcut—trying to gain attention in a "cheap" or quick way rather than disciplining ourselves for godliness. When others spend time with us, or even meet us for the first time, they should be struck by God's work in our lives (our character, our pure speech, our gentle and quiet spirits) not by our trendy clothes. Dressing in a revealing or alluring way is really just a shortcut to making a good impression. It's almost like refusing to shower, but putting on a lot of perfume instead. Or cheating on a test—you might end up with the results you wanted (a good grade, a good impression) but you don't ultimately learn or grow from the experience, and you've really created a false impression.

When others meet us for the first time, they should be struck by God's work in our lives (our character, our pure speech, our gentle and quiet spirits) not by our trendy clothes.



Reflections the Day After Seeing the Movie, *The Passion of the Christ*

by Randy Alcorn

The essentials of the gospel were preserved, presented in such a way that they could prompt—in a heart drawn by the Holy Spirit—confession, repentance, and an accurate belief in Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf.

In Scripture Jesus is called our Creator, Lord, Master, Redeemer, Friend, Brother and many other things, and he is more in addition to what he is called.

My wife Nanci, whom I deeply respect, and who is also my best friend, sat beside me at *The Passion* yesterday on the end of the row in case she had to leave because of being emotionally overwhelmed. She didn't have to leave, but cried steadily, from Gethsemane on. So did I. In our car, Nanci finally broke the silence and said, "I kept thanking Jesus for being my hero."

He is far more than a hero, of course—but he certainly is that. The movie brought me closer to Jesus and to Nanci. I couldn't have asked for anything more.

A thought on the biblical and historical shortcomings of the movie (including identifying Mary Magdalene as the adulterous woman, and that Jews were portrayed as understanding Latin and Romans Aramaic, when the one language they shared in common was actually Greek): I wish they weren't there, of course, but, in my opinion, they were in secondary areas. Paul defines the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 as the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Christ was portrayed in the movie as one sent from the Father to die for the sins of all men, to make all things new. (I loved taking those words of Jesus from Rev. 21 and putting them in his mouth on the bloody walk to the cross) Human depravity, and the equal vanity of secular and religious lostness, was unmistakable.

Jesus was clearly affirmed not as a victim, but as one in authority over Herod and Pilot and Caiaphas and the soldiers, the one who chose to die. It is one thing for people to surrender to deaths they have no choice concerning—but Jesus, who could have called twelve legions of angels to deliver him at any moment, showed incredible restraint and single-minded purpose in accomplishing redemption.

Christ's humanity, e.g. in his tripping as a boy and as a man jokingly splashing his mother with water, was endearing. His claim to be the Messiah, and the reality of that claim, was decisive. Forgiveness was a major theme, and his granting Paradise to an unworthy criminal who couldn't be baptized or pass out a tract or give an offering is a clear statement of salvation by grace through faith. Jesus was neither effeminate nor macho.

His battle against Satan, the crushing of the Serpent's head (Genesis 3:15), and his victory in the resurrection were emphatic. And then there were the words that in the age of tolerance and non-exclusivity you would most expect to never make it into a contemporary movie about Jesus: "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me." The seven sayings of Jesus from the cross were there in all their biblical power.

In other words, the essentials of the gospel were preserved, presented in such a way that they could prompt—in a heart drawn by the Holy Spirit—confession, repentance, and an ACCURATE belief in Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf. There is no doubt in my mind that seeking hearts could come (and are coming) to a genuine faith in Christ through this movie.

To say that of a popular box-office mainstream (non-Billy Graham or *Left Behind*-type) movie in this culture is nothing short of astounding. Almost unimaginable. It is up to the church to offer these people loving relationships, with grace and truth, in which that response can be kindled and explode into flames rather than smolder, then die in isolation from a believing community.

Afterward, I studied the faces of hundreds of people as they left, praying for them. I'd given a book to the young man beside me—big and tough and stoic for the first half of the movie (wasn't going to be weak in front of his girl friend), but reduced to tears by the end. I don't know the kid, but I love him, and I pray God will bring him to Himself.

The movie opened wide doors to the most important facts in the universe—who Jesus is, what he did, why he did it, and our desperate need to respond to Him. That's only the difference between spending eternity in Heaven with God or in Hell without Him. May we look for every opportunity to walk through doors the Holy Spirit is opening by this film.



A national conversation about Jesus and his death? Who but God could pull that off?

One cautionary thought. Though I certainly appreciate him and applaud his efforts in this movie, I think we should be very careful not to elevate Mel Gibson. We should align ourselves with the core of the movie itself—not Mel, who I think is sincere yet immature and vulnerable and, like all of us, capable of a major fall. While I too have seen and appreciated some apparent humility, he is subject to pride and materialism and immorality and everything else.

Let's align ourselves wholeheartedly with the central truths this movie powerfully portrays—precisely because they are true to Jesus and God's Word—but let's be very careful and cautious when it comes to joining the Mel Gibson fan club. If Mel Gibson is discredited, and we have failed to maintain a separation between him and the biblical content of the movie, then the gospel will be discredited. (And even if this doesn't happen—and I pray it won't—elevating celebrities still isn't healthy, for us or them.)

I think Mel Gibson is genuine, and I'm certain that God has used him with this film. But celebrity-worship is idolatry and is a dangerous game, already too rampant with our own evangelical celebrities. It is unworthy of the bride of Christ, who should have eyes only for Jesus. We pay a high price for pedestaling trophy celebrities who have too often fallen, and dragged down with them a true gospel that we should never have linked so closely to them.

Mel Gibson is the latest hero of evangelicals—neither he nor we, and certainly not Jesus, will be well-served by fawning over him and undiscerningly aligning ourselves

with him. (I am very uncomfortable with some of the unqualified and overly-effusive statements from Christian leaders who have had the "honor" and "privilege" to meet and talk with Mel Gibson.)

Gibson is probably being invited right now to speak at countless major Christian churches and gatherings. For his sake and ours I hope he says no. Now, if he's being invited to meet with mature believers for private Bible study and prayer, with no cameras present, I'm all for that. Pray for him, absolutely, selectively agree with and support him, yes, but don't make him—or anyone else—Christianity's poster boy or spokesperson.



We need to topple idols, not baptize them. Every time Christians get mesmerized by and try to capitalize on fame and celebrity, it ends up hurting them, biting us and undermines rather than elevates our Lord.

But because the central and dominant message of the movie is true to Scripture—to the most vital core of the gospel—we are right to respond in profound gratitude to God for bringing the person and work of Christ to theatres and secular talk shows across the nation, and around the world.

That is a staggering miracle, on the level of raising people from the dead, and is a testimony to the power of God. He has not lost interest in a world that is desperately seeking him, even when it doesn't know it. (As Chesterton said, every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is seeking God.)

Finally, some passages related to seeking God, and therefore relevant to our thoughts concerning millions of nonbelievers seeing this movie:

But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 4:29).

You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

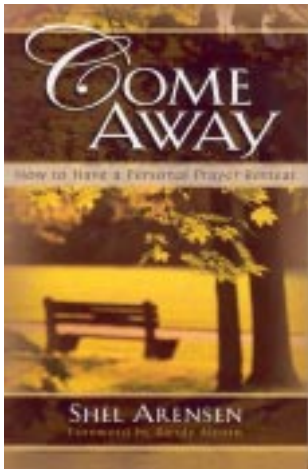
For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened (Matthew 7:7-8).

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven

and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:24-28).



Let's align ourselves wholeheartedly with the central truths this movie powerfully portrays...but let's be very careful and cautious when it comes to joining the Mel Gibson fan club.



Come Away: How to Have a Personal Prayer Retreat, by Shel Arensen

Following is the Foreword to Shel's book, written by Randy Alcorn

"My sheep listen to my voice," Jesus said. Have you been listening to his voice lately? Have you been putting your ear to his Word and asking him to speak to you?

Have you been sitting at the feet of Jesus, as Mary of Bethany did, turning your back on a thousand distractions to enjoy the presence of your bridegroom, the Carpenter from Nazareth—the one who said he was going to prepare a place for you and coming back to get you so you can be with him forever?

We were made for a person and a place. Jesus is the person. Heaven is the place. We'll never be satisfied with any person less than Jesus, and no place less than heaven. We won't be fully content until we're home with our Beloved. But the closest we can get to contentment—and to heaven—while we're still here as aliens and strangers on this earth, is when we come away with Jesus and get away from his substitutes.

Shel Arensen is right on target when he says, "Whether we realize it or not, we desperately need to spend time with God." Many of us realize it, but only sporadically. No sooner do we sense he's the one we're longing for, that he's the cold refreshment for our parched throats, then we turn to lesser streams that cannot quench our thirst. We let that still small voice of God get buried under the din of our busyness. Television, radio, email, classes, sports, business trips, chores, hobbies. Up early, to bed late. Music turned up loud. Talk shows where we hear from everybody but the One who knows everything.

How does this all fit with "Be still, and know that I am God"?

John Piper says God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. We will only be satisfied with God if we go out of our way to spend special time with him.

In the spring of 1988, Nanci and I and our daughters, Karina and

Angela, then only seven and nine, spent two weeks with Shel and Kym Arensen and their children in their home in Kenya. We'll never forget those people or that place. We celebrated Easter in a large hut with



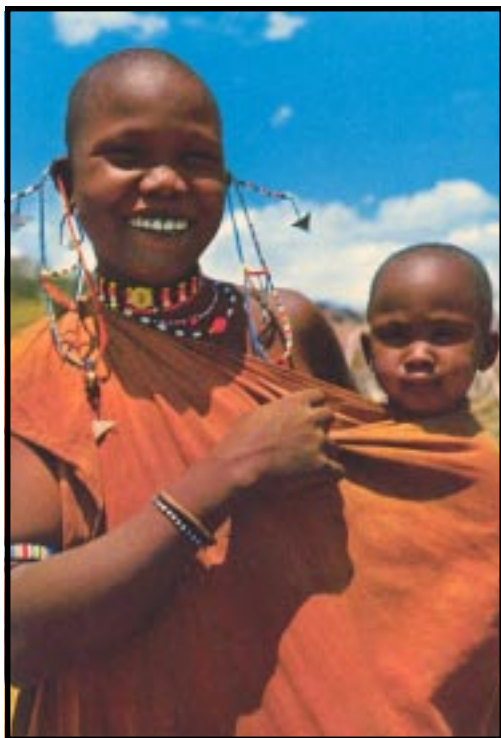
backless benches, worshipping God for hours, delighting to the children as they danced to the music. We looked down over the great Rift Valley, and listened to the monkeys chatter in the trees over our heads.

Sitting here in my office in Oregon, I just turned my head to the left to see a picture I took there of a tall young Maasai woman and her child, who seemed to appear out of nowhere as we picnicked on a game reserve with the Arensens. We still have a Maasai spear in our basement.

We saw wildebeests and zebras, giraffes and gazelles, heard lions and saw hippo tracks outside our tent. Our four-wheeler was chased by baboons. (We found out later the Arensen boys were throwing cheese snacks out the sun roof.) We drove to the coast, to Malindi, where Shel warned us to run through the shallow waters into the Indian Ocean to avoid burning our feet. (In Oregon you run through ocean water for another reason—to keep your feet from getting numb!)

We saw insects so big they cast shadows. Early one morning our daughters looked at us wide-eyed and one of them said, "Daddy, there's a giant leaf with legs standing over my hair brush." I went into the bathroom and stopped in my tracks. It was...well, a giant leaf with legs, straddling a hair brush. I've never seen an insect like it before or since.

Kenya is an exotic place, but what we saw that really stuck with us was more than these things I've recounted. It was the quality of Kym and Shel's life.



We saw the fruit of Shel's years as editor (following in his father's footsteps) of *Today in Africa*, a quality Christian magazine that built up the body of Christ and reached out to unbelievers. We saw how the Arensens cared for people and built their family around the things that matter.

Years later Nanci and I sat with Shel and Kym in Oregon, where they told us that they believed God was calling them to step away from the work they'd been doing all those years. Not content to be comfortable, they wanted to start a new missions adventure, to evangelize and plant churches among the unreached Dorobo people, a tribe of hunters and gatherers.

"Fantastic," we said. "Wow," we said. To step from a long term established ministry in Kenya to such a work among an unreached tribe was as radical as it would have been for us to leave America for Africa.



many years has been putting truth into understandable terms. It's richly illustrated, with a fascinating African flavor, but readily cross-cultural. It's practical. You won't just walk away with theory, but specific ideas of what you can do to come away with God and enjoy his presence.

What could be more important—and more satisfying—than to set aside time to confess, give thanks to the Lord, recognize his greatness, intercede for others, open his Word and seek after God?

I enjoy regular time with God, and have had prayer and Bible study retreats before. Some of my sweetest memories are of days given over to God—having meals with just him, taking a long bike ride with him, talking with him, reading good books with him by my side, listening to his Word and asking him to speak to me. But as I read this excellent book, I realized it's been too long since I carved one of

these times into my schedule. Well, I fixed that. I picked some spots on my calendar and wrote in God's name. After reading this book, I think you'll likely do the same. I'm looking forward to those days. So will you.

"Open your servant's eyes," Elisha prayed. And God did open his eyes, to the invisible realities of the spirit realm we're often blind to. May our eyes be opened as we step into the unseen realm to walk with God, and he steps into this realm to walk with us. May he use *Come Away* to draw us into His presence and empower us in a way that changes the world around us.

What could be more important—and more satisfying—than to set aside time to confess, give thanks to the Lord, recognize his greatness, intercede for others, open his Word and seek after God?



But they did it, crying out to God to prepare the way for them. God answered that prayer powerfully. And now there are five hundred Dorobo people who know Jesus Christ as their Savior, and more than 20 churches planted among the Dorobo where there were none before.

I tell this story for one simple reason—if I'm reading a book on prayer, I want to know whether the person writing it has walked with God in the crucible of life, drawing on his strength to do what could not be done without him. Shel and Kym Arensen have. So what's on these pages is more than just words.

This isn't only a good book on prayer retreats, it's a good book on prayer. It's full of Scripture, which has a power nothing else does. (God never says our points and anecdotes won't return unto him without accomplishing their purpose—he says his Word won't.) It's simple yet profound. It's clearly written, as you might expect from someone whose job for



Shel & Kym Arensen, Heath, Reid, Blake & Malindi
Africa Inland Missions, Kenya

Letters to EPM



My words are not adequate to express to you what reading *Deadline* and *Dominion* have done in my life.

I am a mystery book reader and you captivated me, then you gave me a glimpse of heaven that I will never forget.

Your appreciation for the unborn and those who by earth's standard are not perfect was so moving—so much so that I copied the section on the Down Syndrome child/man (*Deadline*) in heaven and mailed it off to my Christian friends who have just had a Down Syndrome baby boy.

I saw them recently and they said that is the vision that God gave them of their son. You may be hearing from them some day.

Dominion changed me too. You write like you are a black man. I read it like that too. I was raised in New Orleans, and was a young white girl with a black housekeeper. I remember the things people said and sitting on the back of the bus with my Tina.

I have friends from church reading *Deadline* now and I can't wait for my husband to read *Dominion* so we can discuss it. Thank you so much for obeying the Lord and writing such wonderful words, words that change people and bring them closer to our Lord.

C. K., New Orleans, MS

I just finished reading *The Grace & Truth Paradox*. I am blown away by the clear, refreshing teaching in this little book. Thank you for answering questions that have been floating around in my head for a long time.

A. B., Winston-Salem, NC

I just put down your book, *Safely Home*, after reading it pretty much non-stop for the past couple of days. What you wrote really impacted me.

My wife and I returned home from China on Christmas Day this past year with a one-year-old daughter to join our two biological children. We are currently in the process of doing the paperwork for child number two.

In 1995, God touched my heart for a culture in a way I never imagined. After reading your novel, it further spoke to me what was told me two years ago, "This is bigger than just getting a child." I'm not sure what all that entails but your words have challenged me in an even greater way. I should say thanks for that, but when one is in the midst of God's changing the direction of his life, it's difficult to say thanks without trepidation of where the path is heading. But...thanks anyway. Your inspired words



touched my heart. I hope it speaks to my wife the same way as she is anxious to get started.

S. A.

The Purity Principle got here today! I am amazed at how the Lord moves. I told one of our senior pastors tonight that these books came in and that I shouldn't have ordered them. He got a deeply concerned look on his face, thinking I was telling him the book was not biblical. "No," I told him, "the book calls me what I have been all too often—STUPID! Right in line with scripture. And no man likes to know the truth—but we all NEED to know it."

Wow! I can't wait to finish reading this book and I look forward to hearing how God will move in the lives of other men as a result of them reading it.

I do believe God is up to something. Lord knows we live in a dead culture and He calls us to preserve it and light it up—but He calls us to obedience.

No excuses. Just repentance and obedience. Lord Jesus, that is my prayer.

S. B., Houston, TX

I have read your book *The Ishbane Conspiracy*. Oh it was so wonderful! I can't say what I meant, because I'm from Germany and this is my first year with English lessons. But this book was so great, that I need really other books from you!

Through this book, I have learned that I was a Christian in my head, but not in my heart. After I read this, I prayed and I gave my life to Jesus once more. I cried and the Holy Spirit was with me. Sometimes, when the devil comes and wants to hurt me, I read this book as guidebook of God. And after this, I know what He wants and I know He loves me.

Your "sister" J. (14 years old), Germany

I just finished reading *Safely Home*. My face is still wet.

It was two weeks ago that I returned from China, where I was teaching in an underground Bible school. Your book enabled me to relive my experiences.

Thank you so much for writing this book. Truly God was involved in the process. I am recommending the book to my entire congregation.

L. L., Antigo, WI

Lord Foulgrin's Letters is the best book I ever read in exposing Satan's kingdom. What an eye-opener! Everyone should read it. Thank you and bless you for this excellent work.

M. E.

Scientists and Their Gods: The Question of Coherence

by Charles Colson

Can God use accidents and embarrassing pauses? He did in the life of one prominent professor.

On the first day of class at the University of California at Berkeley, Dr. Henry F. Schaefer, was lecturing 680 freshman chemistry students. When he cued his assistant to demonstrate a crucial concept, the assistant wasn't ready. Desperate to avoid "dead air," Schaefer ad-libbed a joke—in which he mentioned having been in church the previous Sunday. By then his assistant was ready, and Schaefer resumed his lecture.

But after class, about fifty students lined up to talk to him. What was a science professor doing in church? One student remarked that a favorite high school chemistry teacher had taught with great certainty that it was impossible to be a practicing chemist and a Christian. What did Schaefer think? He gave a short reply, but didn't have time to answer fully.

The students in line overheard that conversation, and one asked if he would lecture on why a chemistry professor would believe in God. And so God used that brief exchange in 1984 to prod Schaefer into preparing "Scientists and Their Gods," a lecture he has delivered on campuses worldwide and now appears as part of his outstanding new book, *Science and Christianity: Conflict or Coherence?*

Henry Schaefer is an ideal person to answer skeptics. First, he once was one. Furthermore, he has been nominated several times for a Nobel Prize, so no one can say he's not a top scientist. Plus, he communicates on a popular level, making a profound case clearly, simply, and spiced with humor.

In the lecture "Scientists and Their Gods" Schaefer quotes a striking statement from physicist Robert Griffiths: "If we need an atheist for a debate, I go to the philosophy department. The physics department isn't much use."

Schaefer's argument, you see, is that being a scientist doesn't necessarily make one an atheist. Allan Sandage, for example, considered the world's greatest living cosmologist, says, "The world is too complicated in all its parts and interconnections to be due to chance alone. I am convinced that the existence of life with all its order... is simply too well put together."

Or take Nobel Laureate Charles Townes. He said, "To me, God is personal yet omnipresent—a great

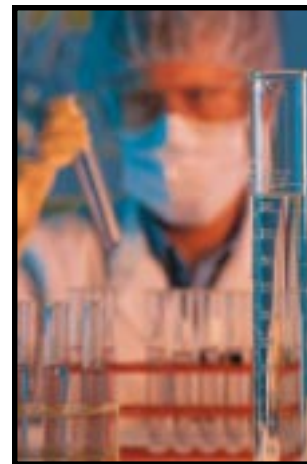
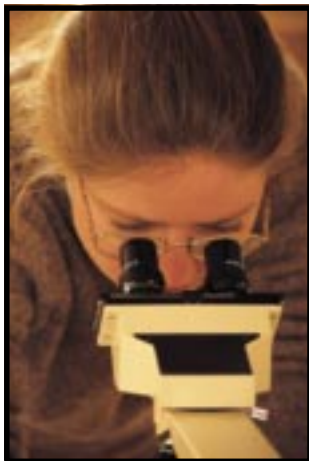
source of strength, who has made an enormous difference to me." Even the atheist Nobel Laureate Richard Feynman admitted, "Many scientists do believe in both science and God... in a perfectly consistent way."

Sigma Xi, the international honor society for scientific and engineering research, polled its members about religion and found that 41 percent of Ph.D. scientists reported that they attended church on a typical Sunday. Another survey found 52 percent of biologists identifying themselves as Christians. M.I.T. professor Alan Lightman adds, "Contrary to popular myth, scientists appear to have the same range of attitudes about religious matters as does the general public."

That's why I'm so grateful to Henry Schaefer, the distinguished scientist and professor at the University of Georgia, for his contribution in his excellent book, *Science and Christianity: Conflict or Coherence?* One reviewer says the book "attempts to woo readers to Christ, not beat them over the head." To obtain your copy, call *BreakPoint* (1-877-322-5527).

Do science and Christianity conflict? Not at all, and Henry Schaefer provides many scientific evidences of their perfect coherence.

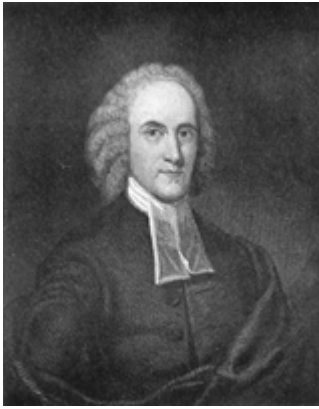
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*I believe in
Christianity as I
believe that the
Sun has risen:
not only
because I see
it, but because
by it I see
everything
else.*

C. S. Lewis,
Is Theology Poetry?





Jonathan Edwards: *American Theologian* by Bonnie Hiestand

Jonathan Edwards was born October 5, 1703, the fifth of eleven children, and the only son, to a family of prominent Congregational ministers in Connecticut.

His childhood suggests that he was seriously religious, even at a young age. He built little dens

in the woods and used them to hold prayer meetings with friends!

Edwards went to the Collegiate School (later called Yale) to train for the ministry. After graduating, he served a Presbyterian congregation in New York (1723-1726). In 1726, Edwards' grandfather was serving as pastor of Northampton church. Because of his advancing age, Solomon Stoddard and his congregation called Edwards to be of assistance, and later (at Stoddard's death), to succeed him. Edwards married Sarah Pierrepont, and enjoyed what has become a fabled marriage, marked by mutual support, admiration, and a remarkable line of illustrious descendants.

1734 birthed a Great Awakening in Northampton, and flowed to every community in the Connecticut River Valley. As a result of his preaching, more than 300 professed to be converted. Edwards stated, "The town seemed to be full of the presence of God; it never was so full of love, nor so full of joy. . . everyone earnestly intent on the public worship, every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth." He was quick to add: "The Spirit of God does the work, and he 'blows where he wills:'"

Edwards did his part to spread the gospel through his preaching, but more significantly contributed a series of books that far outlived his time in Northampton. For most of his life he took thoughts, quotations, observations, ideas and arguments and collected them into notebooks, later to be published (some only now coming to public view). Edwards struggled with concepts and changed his mind regularly on certain issues, while striving to be more and more faithful to the gospel of Christ.

One issue in particular produced three of Edwards' greatest works, the greatest, perhaps, *The Freedom of the Will*. The main argument of the book sets out to prove that the Calvinist account of predestined

humanity is morality's greatest support—it holds human beings responsible for their actions. Though a mere introduction to his main argument, this is the most intellectually powerful such defense ever published.

Edwards remained fascinated with the problem of how to tell whether a Christian's professed faith was truly real and saving. From his Puritan background, he maintained a concern about "temporary faith." His spiritual heritage dealt with the issue by identifying a particular set of steps in a particular order as the only way to salvation. Edwards disagreed with this aspect of tradition.

In a dispute over qualifications for membership, Edwards was asked to leave Northampton after 21 years of service. He insisted that a public profession of saving faith which was based on the candidate's religious experiences was a qualification not only for Holy Communion but also for church membership.

Edwards accepted a call to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in 1750 to perform a difficult ministry, where he was in charge of two congregations and supervising a boarding school for Indian boys. However, during this ministry he took time to complete some of his major works. From there he accepted an appointment as president of the College of New Jersey (later named Princeton). He died on March 22, 1758, less than five weeks after his inauguration.

Jonathan Edwards' last words encapsulated his life. He spoke of his love for Sarah and urged his children to find faith in God. Then he asked that he not be given an elaborate funeral but that what money was available be given to charity. Those

around him spoke freely of the loss that the college, and God's church, would have to bear. Edwards is said to have spoken one last sentence: "Trust in God, and you need not fear."

Edwards is widely acknowledged to be America's most important and original philosophical theologian. His work, as a whole, centered on the absolute sovereignty of God and the beauty of his holiness.



Northampton, Massachusetts

(This article was compiled and edited by Bonnie Hiestand using the following sources: Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th Ed., 2001; "A Mind on Fire," by Stephen R. Homes, Christian History & Biography, Issue 77, Winter 2003, Vol. XXII, No. 1, Page 10.)

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