

# PLAIN TRUTH®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®



By Greg Albrecht

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the corruption of a government or of a particular world leader, and then that revelation caused a revolution—a positive change in government in the targeted area of the world.

At the end of a television program, the IMF team left the scene of their completed mission by stealth, so that no one ever really knew they were instrumental in helping to overthrow corruption and replace it with beneficial leadership.

## YOU are part of the “PMF—Possible Missions Force”

In his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis likened the earthly proclamation of the kingdom of heaven to an invasion of enemy occupied territory. Lewis said that Jesus, the rightful king of the kingdom, has arrived and enlisted Christ-followers as his agents in the midst of a dark world held in the chains of death, disease and sin. In his service, we are ready and willing, in the words of the *Impossible Dream*, the theme song of *Man of La Mancha*, “to walk into hell for a heavenly cause.”

While that word picture applies to Christ-followers all over this world, I like to particularly think of our small team—our **Possible Missions Force (PMF)** made up of *CWR/PTM Friends and Partners*—as carrying out a small but vitally important quest. The mission we

**D**o you remember the original Mission Impossible television show that first aired in the mid-1960s? At the beginning of each episode, the leader of the Mission Impossible team (the team is referred to in the series by the acronym IMF—Impossible Missions Force) pulls out an old reel-to-reel tape recorder along with a manila envelope containing photographs of key individuals involved in this particular undertaking.

The recorded voice on the tape went something like this:

*Good morning Mr. Briggs (then later it was Good morning Mr. Phelps)  
The man you are looking at is*

\_\_\_\_\_ (a description of the person or persons who were the target of the operation followed).

*Your mission, should you decide to accept it is* \_\_\_\_\_ (a description of the purpose and objective of the

assignment followed).

Then, at the end of the tape, concluding remarks went something like this:

*As always, should you or any of your IMF force be caught or killed, the secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions. This tape will self-destruct in 10 seconds. Good luck, Dan (in later episodes it was Good luck, Jim).*

As promised, smoke started coming out of the tape recorder ten seconds later and the tape disintegrated.

The IMF (the *Impossible Missions Force*) was a fictitious group of American secret agents who were called on to perform impossible missions, often involving foreign governments and world leaders. The IMF, of course, used violence as part of its resources, but much of the time the success of their mission depended on unmasking



## Set Free From Sins

**T**here's an old story about a pastor who heard of a widow in his church who claimed to have regular conversations with Jesus.

The pastor decided he needed to stop that “nonsense” dead in its tracks. After all, we can't have people talking with Jesus, can we? The next time the pastor saw the widow he said, “By the way, the next time you talk with Jesus would you please ask him to tell you about sins in my life no one knows about. Be sure and call me when he tells you.”

A week or two later the widow called the pastor and told him that she had talked with Jesus again. The pastor said, “Really? Well, did he tell you about my sins that no one knows about?” The widow said, “I asked him, but Jesus said he couldn't remember your sins.”

Does God remember or does he forget our sins?

*Christ-less religion tells us that we are sinners and we deserve to die because we offended God. If God doesn't take our lives to pay for our sins, Christ-less religion says somebody has to die. Whose life would be worth paying for the sins of the entire world?*

*Well, of course, God himself. So Jesus, the Son of God came to this earth to make the Father happy. God the Father would only be happy with us if blood was spilled—so to spare us the death we so richly deserve, Jesus, God the Son, took the hit. He substituted his life for ours.*

According to the laws of the old covenant given to the nation of Israel, the blood of bulls and goats was shed so that sin could be forgiven. But Jesus came to end all of that—ALL OF THAT.

Jesus gave his earthly life to terminate the old covenant—so our relationship with God is not based on an old covenant where he demands bloodshed before we can be reconciled with him.

The cross of Christ is all about the institution of a new way of life. It's all about a religion-less relationship with God. That's why Hebrews 10:4 says “It is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

But the religion of Christendom distorts and twists the blood of Jesus. According to Christ-less religion God is still angry with you and me because of what we have done.

The gospel of Jesus Christ insists that God is not filled with wrath. That idea is a pagan idea that causes many, in the name of Jesus Christ, to completely misrepresent and misunderstand God.

**God is love.** Humans are all about punishment, wrath and vengeance.... that's not God. Someone who tells us God is like that might be a nice and sincere person, but they are deceived. They have no clue.

*The cross of Christ was not* God the Son appeasing the wrath of God the Father, suffering in the most horrible way possible so that God the Father would not kill you and me and everyone else who ever lived.

*The cross of Christ was* the love of God, the greatest demonstration of love ever, in which Jesus willingly accepted, received and absorbed all of the human wrath, hatred, violence and animosity that humans can ever imagine or perpetrate.

Jesus didn't come to this earth filled with violence, wrath or with punitive or retributive justice.

God didn't solve the problem of the suffering caused by sin by inflicting more suffering—Jesus solved the problem of sin and suffering by ingesting and assimilating all human hostility and hatred.

The peace of God is possible—forgiveness is freely given because Jesus quenched the fires of the hell of hatred and vindictive resentment—*hell burned itself out in Jesus.*

The love of our Lord quenched the fires of any hell that we might experience or that someone might hold over our head. But in order to be free from the power of hatred and retribution, we must accept his new life in order to be healed from the toxic hurt and suffering of Christ-less religion.

At the beginning of our message we related the story of the widow who told her pastor that Jesus told her that he could not remember the pastor's sins.

Now of course that story introduces a fascinating question—if there is something God cannot do, doesn't that mean that he is not God?

The answer is that *God chooses to forget.* Of course God has a perfect memory. But when it comes to his relationship with you and me, he chooses to do something we cannot do with each other—God forgives and forgets. □

*Join us for “Set Free from Sins” at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of January 26, 2020.*



have been given may seem to be “impossible” but as the angel told a bewildered Mary, the mother of Jesus, “... nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

We are, as you well know, a Christ-centered ministry. We are all about “all Jesus, all the time.” He is our focus and our cause and our all in all. We serve him. We proclaim his kingdom of heaven in numerous ways with our many ministry resources and tools.

**Our purpose as Christ-followers is to lose ourselves in the cause of something bigger and more important.** As members of the PMF our hearts are filled with the love and grace of God, so we dedicate our lives to serve those who are spiritually hungry, thirsty, naked, alienated, sick and imprisoned (see Matthew 25:34-40).

Our mission as Friends and Partners of CWR/PTM is driven by Jesus, who lives his life in us, so that we desire to proclaim Jesus and his gospel to those who are spiritually impoverished, addicted, enslaved and deceived. We live to realize the dream of helping others come to know Jesus and experience the grace and love of God. ***Our quest is to point others to Jesus, who invites them to embrace him just as he has invited you and me.***

## All About Jesus

Have you ever thought of the birth of Jesus being the most impossible mission ever?

No doubt about it—when God in the person of Jesus came down to be one of us, it was the most unbelievable and, to the human mind, impossible mission ever. It was one of the most far-fetched and improbable endeavors, an assignment given to a young, unmarried woman named Mary.

If human bookmakers had to give odds on the success of God’s mission in Christ, we may safely assume that Jesus faced long odds. You and I know who the religious authorities favored in the “horse

race” between Jesus and Christ-less religion!

The birth of Jesus, not to mention his life, death, burial and resurrection, was not the result of a human initiative or a well thought out human plan. Nobody would have ever, in a million years, decided to achieve the objectives of this seemingly improbable mission in the way God did.

And it all started before his human birth, with the announcement to Joseph about the particulars of Mary’s pregnancy, as the angel assured Mary, “...nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

As far as the human mind goes, it was seemingly an “impossible” mission from the get-go.

Mary was told that God the Holy Spirit would “come upon” her—not in the way a biological father would have sexual relations with a biological mother—but in “coming upon” her by the Holy Spirit, God the Father would miraculously impregnate Mary. If we had been Joseph, we would have concluded that the message delivered by the angel was IMPOSSIBLE!

So **why** would God, in the person of Jesus, decide to begin his human life by being miraculously conceived in the womb of Mary? **Why** not start out human life as an adult, like Adam? **Why** would God decide that Mary’s pregnancy be so completely out of the ordinary?

**Why** select a teenage girl to be the mother of Jesus? **Why** not have Mary learn to be a mother first, by having at least one other child before Jesus? Though there was no human father, **why** not at least let Mary be married so that attention was not called to the fact she was not married when she conceived?

1) Jesus was not just any baby. Jesus was the fully human and fully divine Son of God, both natures united in one human person.

2) The birth of Jesus is the beginning of the kingdom of heaven on earth, the beginning of



**“This tape will self-destruct in ten seconds. Good luck...”**

the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Donald Macleod said in his book *The Person of Christ*, the birth of Jesus “stands on the threshold of the New Testament.” The birth of Jesus is the first sign (the first warning shot, if you will) that what will follow is something completely out of human control. It is the first sign that the gospel is about God’s grace, not about human performance or accomplishment.

3) The birth of Jesus announces that Jesus is all about God—or put another way, the *Mission Impossible* involves all that God is—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The birth of Jesus is the Incarnation of God in human flesh.

“Incarnation” is the theological term that describes the love, grace and mercy of God, his willingness to make himself vulnerable, his willingness to humble himself and descend from the glory of eternity into the barnyards and stables of our lives.

The Incarnation is the divine miracle that announces God’s desire to intimately involve himself with his creation—becoming one of us, in spite of all of our flaws and foibles.

The birth of Jesus was the beginning of the end of earthly power, of inhumanities perpetrated by humans on their fellow humans, of military dominance and the impoverishment and slavery of

those unable to stand against brute force. It all makes sense to us now—but *what if we had been living when Jesus was born?*

### What If?

Had we been living in Bethlehem when Jesus was born it really would have sounded like an impossible mission, don't you think?

- *What if* you had lived in Bethlehem, a few houses away from where Jesus was born?

- *What if* the day after Jesus' birth the next-door neighbor to that place where Jesus was born told you that a little baby boy had been born among the animals in what we would think of as a barnyard today?

- And *what if* your next-door neighbor in Bethlehem had then told you that without anyone noticing it, without any fanfare whatever, that little baby boy was God in the flesh...???

- And *what if* your next-door neighbor in Bethlehem had also told you that the little one-day-old

baby boy was the Savior, and that he would not just save and redeem and rescue the people in that little town of Bethlehem but one day he would inaugurate his worldwide kingdom of peace and non-violence...?

- And *what if* your next-door neighbor in Bethlehem had also told you that this little baby boy would eventually conquer Rome by allowing himself to be crucified in shame on a cross...and that one day he would rule over the entire world without ever shedding anyone else's blood on the battle field?

- And *what if* your next-door neighbor had said that this child was born to a young, humble, working-class family who had arrived in town pushing the 21st century equivalent of a shopping cart? *What if* you had been told the birth of this little baby signaled the end of all authoritarian religion that preyed upon ignorance, fear and superstition—and the end of violent, greedy human kingdoms

who rule by intimidation and the sword?

**What if**, several decades ago, God had told you that he would like to use you to help proclaim this amazing good news to the world?

**What if** you had been on an entirely different "Christian" team at the time that had a completely different idea about Jesus and the gospel?

*Would you have believed* what Jesus eventually did in your life could have happened? *Would you have believed* then that Jesus would carry out an impossible mission in my life and in yours?

Now, you and I are part of a **Possible Missions Force (PMF)**

-serving others in Jesus' name. Now, on the PMF team we seek to point others to Jesus so that they too may experience and rejoice in this wonderful gospel that will transform their lives as it has transformed mine and yours.

The kingdom of God deserves all of our heart and soul and energies and contributions. **This is a cause worth losing ourselves in, because it is a cause greater than ourselves!**

Where there is physical or spiritual slavery, abuse, addiction, oppression, superstitions and ignorance, our PMF team (CWR/PTM), stands ready to serve in Jesus' name. Where there is spiritual arrogance and deception, pride and manipulation, CWR/PTM stands in Christ-centered opposition. By God's grace, he is using our PMF team to change lives!

WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE—for now, in this life and for eternity! This is God's mission—this is his dream. Our quest is to follow Jesus, marching "into hell for a heavenly cause."

It may seem preposterous that such a small minority of people might be used to proclaim the goodness and grace of God in such a powerful way, but remember, "...nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

Make no mistake. By the grace of God, as a collective and united team of Friends and Partners, **we are making a difference**, for now and for eternity.

Our ministry's message is being read and heard and listened to by those we serve in the name of Jesus! As Partners and Friends of this worldwide ministry of CWR/PTM our calling—our quest, our mission and our dream—is to make a difference in the lives of many in the name of Jesus. We are **PMF—Possible Missions Force!**

Our mission may seem impossible to human eyes, but "...nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

Thank you for your part in this ongoing work! We look forward to a wonderful year of ministry, serving others in the name of Jesus. □

*...this child was born to a young, humble, working-class family who had arrived in town pushing the 21st century equivalent of a shopping cart...*





# Finding Humor Even in Dark Places

*By Peter Rosenberger*



**I**n an interview with AARP some years back, the interviewer mentioned how so many people serving as caregivers don't necessarily see themselves or identify as a caregiver. They asked, "How do people know if they are indeed a caregiver?"

The question struck me as hilariously funny, and lapsing into my best Jeff Foxworthy impression, I quipped, "If you have a professional carpet cleaner on retainer...you're probably a caregiver."

Bursting into laughter, they suggested Jeff and I do a routine based upon that. Later, asking Jeff if he wanted to do it, he said, "Sure—write out some jokes and we'll put something together." Feigning outrage, I laughed back at him, and I said, "Hey, these aren't jokes. This is my life!"

From "...using Neosporin as a verb" to "...being the one asking for a price check on suppositories at the grocery store" to "...hooking up our dog to my wife's wheelchair just to see if it would work" (I have footage)—hilarious moments can exist in the life of a caregiver.

We certainly cry enough tears,

but do we chuckle and laugh enough? Sadly, no.

Why? **Sometimes, as Christians we take ourselves too seriously.** Lighten up and take a lesson from our Creator. God invented the Duck-billed platypus, right? Better still, he created you and me!

More than three decades into our own medical challenges, my wife and I have learned to see the lighter side and find humor and joy—even in harsh circumstances.

Wheeling her home from her 80th surgery last year, I pushed Gracie into a large, crowded elevator at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. The occupants immediately stared at her. Granted, she's a beautiful woman, but her metal prosthetic legs prominently appeared below her hemline.

An amputee for several decades, she's somewhat used to that, but to add "injury to injury," her arm rested in a sling following the operation that morning on a nerve near her elbow.

Watching the elevator passengers unabashedly gawking at her, I decided to have some fun and loudly lamented, "Worst hysterectomy ever!"

What? Dare a Christian jest at such a serious condition? Well, it wasn't coarse jesting, so I guess it's okay.

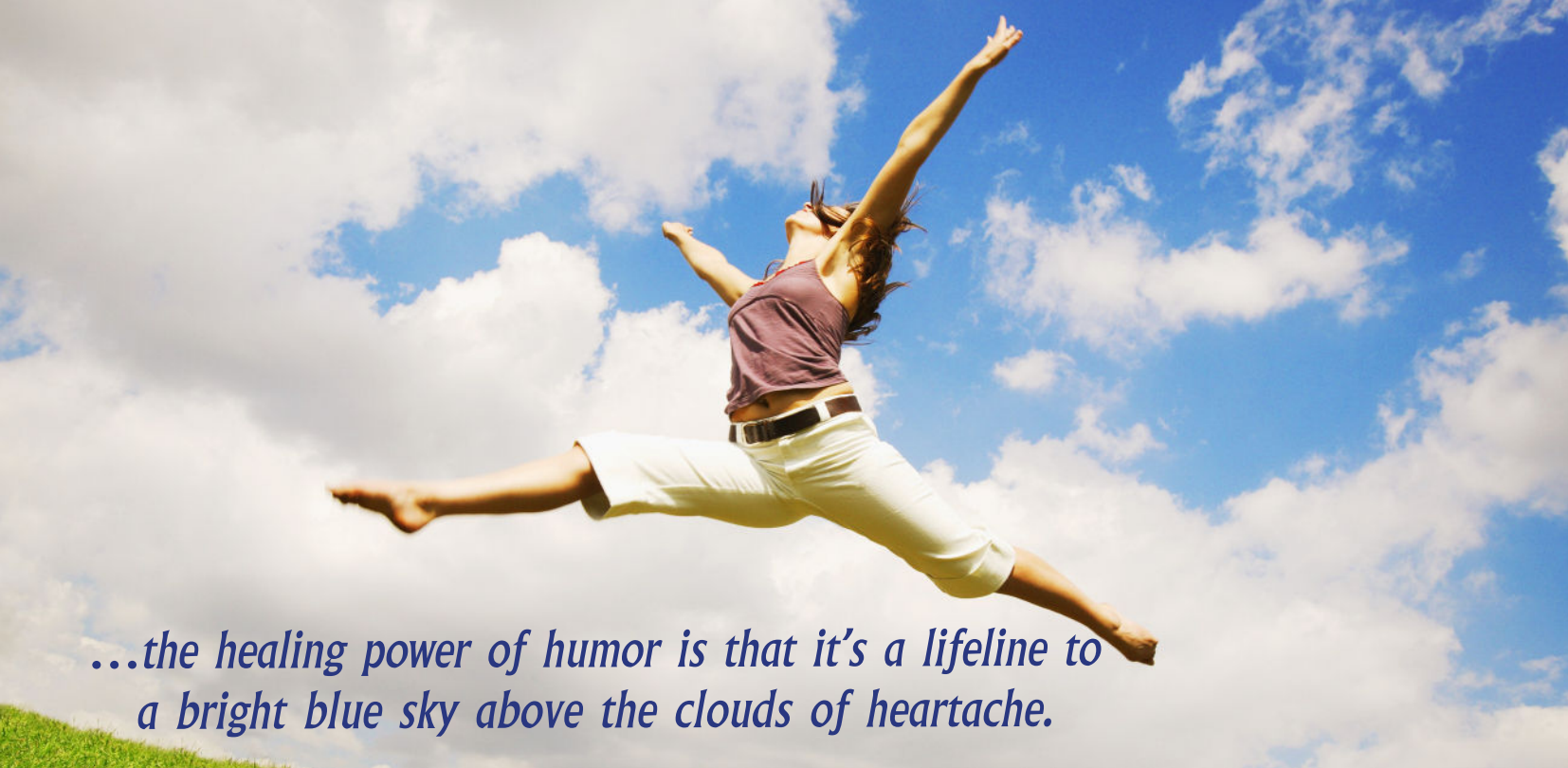
Although Gracie tried to hide a smile while rolling her eyes at my goofiness, the elevator occupants all flinched and immediately found something interesting to see on their collective shoes.

Backing her out when the doors opened, I turned and gave a parting shot over my shoulder, "She put up a fight—God love her!"

Despite post-surgical discomfort, Gracie laughed all the way to the car. I don't know what others do following a loved one's 80th surgery but being able to laugh makes the journey a bit easier.

A sense of humor can detach from heartache without detaching from the person. Humor helps us discover that although we're still paddling on whitewater rapids as a caregiver, we can travel downstream instead of exhausting ourselves pushing upstream against the current, and easily end up becoming "weary in well-doing."

Like most caregivers, I possess a painfully serious side. Yet during



*...the healing power of humor is that it's a lifeline to a bright blue sky above the clouds of heartache.*

intense situations, somberness often needs a pressure valve release. Humor helps.

But humor doesn't have to be a defense mechanism, nor must it be snarky at someone else's expense. Rather than living in the punchline, **the healing power of humor is that it's a lifeline to a bright blue sky above the dark clouds of heartache.**

While we can't always see it, our hearts are comforted to know joy and beauty—though often hidden by suffering—still remain. If we bring to our remembrance this scripture, "All those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," we won't expect a cakewalk through life, but we still

can find joy throughout life, even in the darkest places. Humor helps.

Psalm 126:5-6 says, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Lest we forget, just hours before Jesus was to be betrayed, beaten, and crucified, his disciples heard him say words that still apply today: "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy." (John 16:20).

Yes, as caregivers, we will cry. Yet, those tears don't have to be full of rage and despair. Healthy tears are the goal. When those flow, we discover that laughter can flow, as well.

Sometimes, we need a little help from those who've weathered the storms. The permission to laugh often comes from those with the most scars. The places of our greatest sorrows can also serve as markers of great freedom—and even beauty... "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." □

*Peter Rosenberger hosts the radio program Hope for the Caregiver, heard on 185 stations in the United States. For more than thirty years, he's cared for his wife who lives with severe disabilities. He is the author of "7 Caregiver Landmines and How You Can Avoid Them."*

Grace Based  
Christ Centered  
Living Faith

**CHRISTIANITY  
WITHOUT THE  
RELIGION**

with **GREG ALBRECHT  
& BRAD JERSAK**

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## Birthday Cards

*Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).*

I've never sent birthday cards—none, not ever. The practice is no more than a card industry ploy to get people to purchase expensive pieces of paper. At least that's part of my rationale. But then I never made cupcakes or birthday cakes either. In fact, son Carlton has threatened to write a tell-all book titled "Growing up Without Cupcakes."

Back to birthday cards. This morning, however, I read in the Sunday paper a heart-warming story about a woman who sends out more than five thousand hand-made birthday cards each year, the vast majority to entire strangers. Beth Catlin, age 59, resides in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. For thirty-eight years she has worked full-time for Wilson Pollock where she does piece work, most recently placing labels on rakes. "Beth is a very conscientious worker," according to a supervisor. "She likes to see [her hard work] reflected in the numbers on her weekly paycheck."

When I think of assembly-line piece work, I'm reminded of the old "I Love Lucy" TV show. Lucy and Ethel are working on a fast conveyor belt in a chocolate factory. To keep up, they end up eating half the product. That's the funny side of piece work. Too often, however, women and children are forced to work long hours with few breaks just to keep up with those unforgiving numbers—numbers that show their measly earnings.

For Beth, however, the job is perfect. Numbers mean everything. Barely a toddler, she was discovered to be developmentally disabled. Her condition is similar to what Dustin Hoffman profoundly portrayed in "Rain Man." She is a "numbers" savant, a form of autism.

She began making and sending cards when she was twelve and has never looked back. When she was recently visited by Ronnie Palaneczky, a reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer, the encounter was interesting. "Hi Beth," he said shaking her hand. "I'm Ronnie.

It's wonderful to finally meet you." The response: "Ronnie, July 3."

I ask myself: If I were only 59 and I had put enough energy into it, might I have been able to memorize 5,000 names and birthdays? Not a chance. But that's not all. Beth has memorized all the addresses as well.

We might imagine Beth was excited to meet Ronnie and talk about her astonishing memory. But personal interaction with others is simply not part of Beth's emotional make-up. Palaneczky makes that clear:

*Beth's gift has come at a cost. She has never mastered simple tasks such as grocery shopping, household chores or social relationships, and she*

### In some instances, her card is the only one people get on their special day...

*hasn't the capacity to be reasoned with about some simple things, such as where to put a dish towel when she's finished using it.*

*Beth lives moment to moment, moving through life without any apparent emotional connection to any of the things, past or present, that give life obvious meaning to many of us.*

But Beth does have her own pleasures—pleasures entirely related to numbers. When her own birthday arrives on September 22, the mailbox is overflowing with cards, some no doubt having arrived early, others belated. It makes no difference. It's the date and the number of cards that counts. So many arrive every September, her mother tells, that her face "glows with excitement."

Despite her disabilities, she has found her own comfortable abode in an incomprehensible world by sending birthday cards. In some instances, her card is the only one people get on their special day—often anticipated days ahead.

Tender mercies for all who receive her cards, but mostly tender mercies for Beth who dutifully tallies and files all cards sent and received in that orderly cabinet of her seriously disordered mind. □

—Ruth Tucker



## Quotes & Connections



"Jesus was not killed by atheism and anarchy. He was brought down by law and order allied with religion, which is always a deadly mix. Beware those who claim to know the mind of God and are prepared to use force, if necessary, to make others conform. Beware those who cannot tell God's will from their own."—Barbara Brown Taylor

The Cross reveals God unwrathed—nonviolent, self-giving, radically forgiving, co-suffering love. And this—impossibly, amazingly—is how he overcomes evil with good. God in Christ draws all the evil, all the sin, all the violence and the resulting suffering into himself. And the Light of his love overcomes the darkness so that from that moment, "It is finished" also means "It begins!" What begins? "Behold I am making all things new!"—Brad Jersak, *A More Christlike Way*

The amazing wonder is that God is much different than we thought and much better than we feared... The freeflow of unearned love, what we call grace, is almost a punishment for most people. They fiercely resist it.—Richard Rohr, *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*

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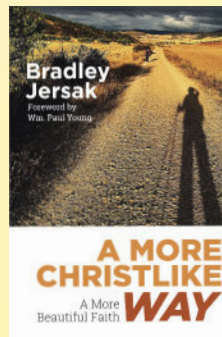
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—Brian Zahnd, Word of Life Church

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"I don't think I've ever read a book that made my heart sing louder."—Jonathan Hodges

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