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He Is Who He Says He Is by Greg Albrecht

“IT IS WHAT IT IS”

It is what it is. When a dilemma for which there seems to be no clear solution or answer is wrestled with, without being resolved, one will often pronounce to family and friends, “It is what it is.” It is what it is states, often with a hint of resignation, a given situation or conundrum is beyond satisfactory explanations and must be accepted *as it is*.

Perhaps God is a bit like that. **God Is Who He Says He Is**—and we cannot be expected to fully grasp, as finite humans, his eternity, beauty and majesty. As his children, as we mature in our understanding of Father God it is inevitable that we realize, on many levels, God is more and greater and “better” than we previously thought. In many cases, God is not at all like many previously thought him to be.

If our perspective of God is distorted, then that misrepresentation corrupts and twists virtually every part of our life. Further, if our perspective of God is distorted, then we must ask whether religious authorities and institutions have misrepresented God.

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer (1897-1963) once said: “What comes into our minds when we think

“For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” —John 1:17

about God is the most important thing about us.”

Reacting and interacting with this thought, and adding even more focus, the prolific and honored Christian scholar and author, C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), almost precisely Tozer’s contemporary, said, “How

God thinks of us is not only more important [than what we think of him], but infinitely more important.”

What we believe about God influences what we can possibly hope for and imagine he thinks of us. **What we think, believe and embrace about God, who he is, and what he thinks about us, will shape everything in our lives.**

If one thinks of God as being filled with wrath, it is much easier for one to be filled with wrath toward those whose behavior is not appropriate. If one thinks of God as racist, bigoted and mad at the world, then one may feel justified in being racist, bigoted and mad at the world.

As the old saying goes, “God created man in his own image and man returned the favor.” We return to our premise: **God is not necessarily who we think he is, God is who and what he says he is.**

“I AM”

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14).

The backstory to this verse involves the life of Moses in Egypt. Moses, by his own self-description (Exodus 2:22), was an alien living in a foreign land. Moses had never really been at home anywhere. He was a child of the enslaved Hebrews, adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh and given an Egyptian name. He became a “Prince of Egypt”—the title of a 1998 movie that told the story of the Exodus.

When Moses grew up and became a prince of Egypt, one day, while he was trying to save one of his own, a Hebrew, who was being beaten by an Egyptian, he killed the Egyptian, and he had to flee for his life. He became a fugitive and was forced to shepherd sheep, working for his father-in-law in a land outside the boundaries of Egypt.

That was the context when God introduced

himself to Moses, via a burning bush that burned and burned but never burned up. Moses was going about his business, taking care of his sheep, when God spoke to him out of a burning bush (Exodus 3:1-4).

God told Moses he had selected him to go back to Egypt, where Moses had posters hanging on every police station wall—where Moses was a wanted man—and Moses would lead his captive people, the Hebrews, out of Egypt.

Moses objected to that grand mission, saying that no one would pay any attention to him, even if he could avoid being put to death by the Egyptians for the murder he had committed (Exodus 3:11). When God insisted, Moses said that were he to lead the slave-nation of Israel out of Egypt they had a right to know the God who deputized me for this mission.

Moses, in Exodus 3:13, asks God who he is, so that if Moses does what God tells him, he can tell the Israelites who God is. God's cryptic answer: *"I AM who I am"* (Exodus 3:14).

"I AM WHO I AM"

God is who he is. Two simple, powerful words. God is who he says he is. *I AM*.

These two words identify God throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. *I AM*. In the parlance of the 21st century, when "self-identity" has risen to be a "God-given" right—God self-identifies to Moses by telling him *I AM*.

God is not who you think he is or who you would like him to be or who you have been told he is—God is who he says he is.

God Does Not Have Love—He IS Love. Love is who God is. Jesus, the Son of God, God in the flesh, fully revealed God the Father and did so more than anything by his love. God is love—he doesn't have love as one of his attributes, *love is who he is*.

The perfect illustration of the perfect love of God—the revelation of God and his love—is the gift of that which has unsurpassable worth—God the Son—to another who is completely undeserving—that would be you and me.

The nature of God's love is the act of unconditionally giving ultimate worth to another at a great cost to oneself. This is why we are Christ-centered, for it is in and through him that God the Father is revealed and made known to us.

HE IS WHO HE IS

Throughout history, humans have been tempted, and often given in to the impulse to re-make God in their image—the temptation is to turn God into a small god, so we can understand him and manipulate him, rather than worship him as he is, which is infinitely greater and bigger than we are.

The human tendency is to reduce God into measurable and controllable elements and dimensions. ***But God is not who you think he is; God is who he says he is.***

"To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing (Isaiah 40:25-26).

The late John Stott, an English pastor, scholar and author (1921-2011), once told about his visit to a small little country church in England. Stott was spending the summer in this area, researching and writing, so he attended this church for a number of weeks.



"The Son is the image of the Invisible God."

Week after week he heard the pastor talk about issues facing the local village and their little church. Week after week, John Stott heard their prayers, which were always about their own members—church members who were sick, church members who were on vacation—or as the English still call it, “on holiday.”

At the end of his summer, Stott concluded about this little village church: *“They were a village people and they worshipped a village god.”*



If your God is encompassed by the boundary markers of your town or even country, your God is too small. If you have created God in your own image, or more likely, someone has helped you to do so, then ...

- God will hate the people who you hate.
- He will vote for the person you vote for.
- He will be a member of your

denomination and your political party.

- Whatever you are passionate about, God will also share that passionate zeal.
- You may speak of God’s “plan for your life” without considering how remarkably identical it is to your own plan for your life.

If you have created God in your own image or allowed someone help you do so, God will agree with you about everything. You will have him in your hip pocket, ready to be taken out, activated, “turned on” and “conjured up” to be used whenever you need him. But here’s the

twisted ideas about God.

You might say, *“Well, sure—he talked to fishermen, farmers, poor people, sick people, prostitutes—they had no idea.”*

Well, yes, Jesus did teach working-class people—but if you look closely, Jesus spent as much or more time with religious authorities teaching them how wrong they were about God.

Jesus came to reveal the Father—he is the very essence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him, all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

*“For in him, all things were created... He is before all things, and in him, all things hold together.
—Colossians 1:16-17*

bottom-line truth—history teaches us that most of the time, most humans have had a completely *screwed-up and distorted idea of God.*

History teaches us that the majority is often wrong, and that certainly fits when we survey what humanity has believed—and in many cases still does believe—about God.

Jesus spent a great deal of his time teaching people about God the Father—revealing God to people because people had

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:15-20).

God Is Who He Says He Is. □

Greg Albrecht is President of Plain Truth Ministries.

25 Father's Days

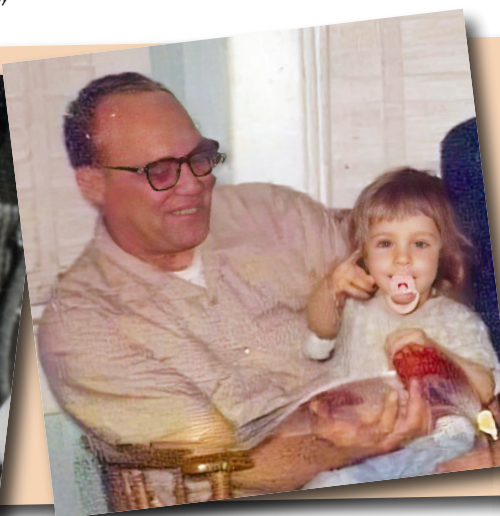
Laura Urista

This year marks the 25th Father's Day since my dad passed away. It's hard for me to imagine he's been gone for a quarter-century. I'm the youngest of five children, and of all of us, I probably had the closest relationship with our dad.

Dad was a "career Navy man,"



when I reached my teens, it felt like Dad became even stricter and more distant. After I left home and went away to college, I was frankly glad to be out from under Dad's "rule," even though the college I attended was strict too, at least in comparison



entering the Navy at age 17, shortly before the United States entered World War 2. He ran a "tight ship" at home and was strict with me and my older siblings. When I was three years old, Dad joined a strict, legalistic church that dramatically impacted all of our lives. Church doctrines and culture further amplified Dad's strict enforcement of rules at home.

As a young girl, I loved to crawl into Daddy's lap and listen to his stories or hear him sing. I was born on Father's Day, and I think we had a special relationship because of that. I was definitely "Daddy's girl." But

with other Southern California colleges in the 1980s.

I knew my dad loved me, but I often wished we could just have a happy, enjoyable conversation without it becoming a lecture filled with judgment, criticism and correction. I remember as a teenager saying once (and ONLY once!), "Okay Dad, I don't need a dissertation." Boy, did I get in trouble for that! I actually didn't even know the meaning of the word "dissertation" at the time, but I'd heard my older brother say it. Of course, he knew not to say it loud enough so Dad could hear!

Unfortunately, Dad started to

develop Alzheimer's disease when I was in my late twenties, just at a time I truly wanted to reconnect with him. But by then, it was too late to have a real conversation. There were snippets, but nothing of real substance. I treasure those precious snippets now.

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about what I would say to my dad if I had just one more chance.

I would like to tell him how much I love him and how proud I am to be his daughter.

I would like to thank him for his examples of loyalty, honesty and faith in God, even when it was terribly difficult to do the right thing.

I'd thank him for his service to our country.

I would thank him for working hard to provide for our family and instilling within me the desire for a good education.

I'd tell him I understand a little better, now that I'm a parent and grandparent, why he was so strict and sometimes tough on us kids.

But most of all, I'd tell him I wish we had gotten to know and understand each other better.

A ROYAL LESSON

My husband and I have been enjoying "The Crown" series on Netflix. Watching the unfolding turmoil and drama of members of the royal family, it deeply struck me that no matter how much wealth, power or fame a person might have, life can be desperately hollow and agonizing without love, acceptance and understanding. You could be living a fairy-tale life, with seemingly every physical blessing anyone could ask for, and yet be miserable without close, loving relationships with God and family. Wise king Solomon seemingly "had it all," but he came to understand this at the end of his life (see Ecclesiastes 2).

If you are blessed to have living parents or grandparents, please make an effort to tell them how

you truly feel about them. Try to let them know how much you love them, even if it's difficult. Tell them before it's too late.

And if you are a parent or grandparent, try to intentionally have enjoyable conversations most of the time. Let your children and grandchildren get to know who you are, but also make an effort to really get to know them, too. Take an interest in what they're excited about and ask them questions to draw them in.



Try to listen and enjoy their thoughts without completely dominating the conversation with your own point of view or stories of how it used to be "back in the day."

Twenty-five Father's Days—a quarter of a century! It's a long time, but it has gone by in a flash. I pray that my experience with my dad will help me do a better job of getting to know my own children and grandchildren. I hope I will be more intentional about letting them know how much I love them. Which reminds me of the final lyric of the song *Do You Love Me?* (from the musical "Fiddler on the Roof"): *Yes, I love you. It doesn't change a thing, but even so, after twenty-five years, it's nice to know.* □

Laura Urista is Vice President and Managing Editor of Plain Truth Ministries.



This God Comes Down

Excerpt from Brad Jersak's new release

Out of the Embers: Faith after the Great Deconstruction

The revelation of Good News—through Scripture and the incarnation of Jesus—is that God is gracious and compassionate.

This God hears the cries of our groanings and comes down. This God always descends to be found among the lowly in the low places. Nearly every major revelation of God in Scripture occurred not in the glory of the temple but in the darkness and dread of afflicted people. That's where the prophets show up, where God shows up, where Jesus shows up.

This God comes down and comes from within a people in bondage for four hundred years—and liberates an entire nation.

This God comes down and comes from within a parched people wandering through the wilderness, struggling to understand where they're going—and he serves living water to the thirsty.

This God comes down and comes from within the cave of Adullam—and he reveals himself to the fugitive David, delivering him from the hand of Saul.

This God comes down and comes from within those under siege who are singing lamentations but also "Great is Thy Faithfulness" in the midst of their devastation—and he answers their cries.

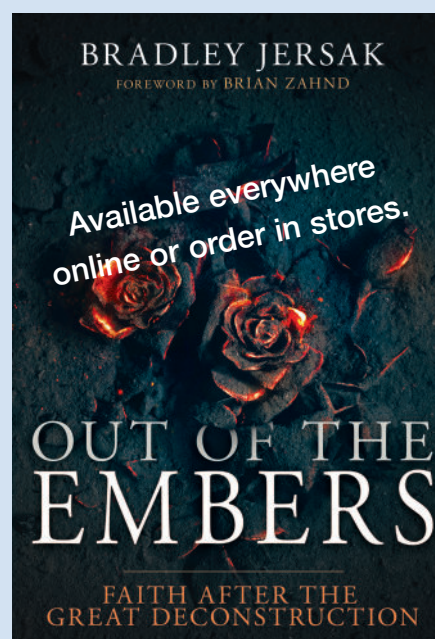
This God comes down and from within the prophets in exile—and brings hope in a strange land, offering a vision of their redemption but also proclaiming the God who suffers with them and among them.

This God comes down and from within the occupied territories through the incarnation of Jesus, the Light of the World—and preaches freedom for the oppressed, even while they're still downtrodden.

Most of all, *the Light who comes down also*

shines from within the wounds he bears on the Cross for the salvation of all. The epicenter of human evil (our crucifixion of God's Son) becomes the cruciform throne upon which Christ is revealed as *Pantocrator* (i.e., Ruler of the Universe—a term used ten times in Scripture).

Where does this God come from? From HERE! Not in



DECONSTRUCTION: Trendy brand name for "backsliding"? Or a process essential to authentic faith? Liberation or trauma? Prison break or exile?

In *Out of the Embers*, Brad Jersak explores the necessity, perils, and possibilities of the "Great Deconstruction." Will it sabotage our communion with God or infuse it with the breath of life of Christ himself?

"Finally, someone has written what I think will be the textbook on the deconstruction of belief."

—David Hayward

an otherworldly elsewhere or utopian future. From within THIS world, in MY humanity, in the REAL human condition, MY falling-apart world. Out of the embers of my deconstruction!

After all that, where was the Light? *Here, in this world, in the darkness. It looks like a cross. It looks like a cruciform and wounded God.* It looks like the people who, by necessity and tragedy and evils done against them, have been thrown out and thrown down at the foot of the cross. The light shines through those who've experienced assault and those who've wondered where God is in all of this.

God is hanging there... with you. From within your wounds, the light shines. The wounds of every bullet hole, every shrapnel wound, every sexual assault, every molestation of a child—all our wounds are drawn up into him and into his self-sacrificial love.

And then he says, "I want you to take up your cross now." *The Jesus Way of the cross* (cruciformity) is just this: "active, voluntary, self-offering love which is the life of God himself."

That's the light that shines from within, the life that rises from the embers of deconstruction.

The faith that is...

- wise but not clever.

- deep but not ethereal.
- engaged but not ideological.

Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth, the city on the hill, and the light on the lampstand" (Matthew 5:13-15)—meaning we are to *embody the grace of the Beatitudes*: poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, and even persecuted witnesses for his sake.

We pray, "Let your kingdom come," meaning "reign in me, here today, from the inside out."

And we surrender our lives to his care, trusting in the grace of today. ☐

Brad Jersak serves as editor and art director for *CWRm*.

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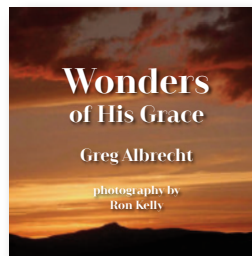
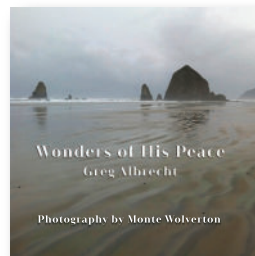
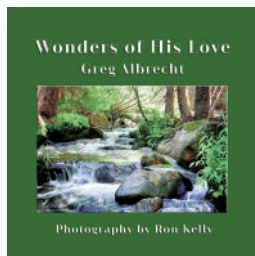
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with Greg Albrecht

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