

# Something in the Nothing

The Bible does not say this is the case, but it seems logical to assume that God's first three creations were darkness, space, and time. I believe that these three constituted a kind of cosmic canvas which our universe required. It is also my belief that one of the reasons God spent six orderly days in creation was to symbolically celebrate and fill these three things. The tangible objects of the universe filled the space, the lights filled the darkness, and the moments of the days commenced time. Let's look at each one of these things specifically.

## Time

Time is a fascinating mystery that has not ceased movement since creation began. In cooperation with space, time was needed for anything in the created universe to exist. There is a clever saying that says "God created time to keep things from happening all at once." Very clever, but think about it. If time did not exist yet, where did all the "onces" in this scenario come from? "Once" is time. If there was no time there would not be any at onces at all.

## Space

As mentioned, time requires cooperation with space. Space defines time and time defines space. Any space at all would mean there is at least one "once" or moment of time. Earth was the first moment of space. It wouldn't have been able to be created at all if space and time did not first exist. That is, with the rules of nature that God instituted. If He had wanted to, He could have instituted an entirely other set of rules. But He didn't. Before the beginning, there was nothing—not even an atom whose mere existence would itself suggest time. We can assume these things if we are also assuming that time suggests space and space suggests time.

Then earth and all the other objects in the universe kept on existing. We are talking about a forward motion into many billions and billions of moments. If we are going with the view that the earth is about 6,000 years old and depending on several factors, that's over 189,000,000,000 seconds. That's a lot of moments.

## **Darkness**

John 1:3 tells us that Jesus who is God made all things and that nothing came into existence without Him. Darkness is one of these many things. Some assume that darkness must have existed with God before He created anything. Are we saying, then, there is an object that wasn't created by God? Rather I think that our feeble minds can only really imagine pre-creation as God floating around in the dark when in reality it is just one of those things our finite minds can because it involves something that preceded anything that we know. It's like imagining heaven; we can only really do so with pictures of things here in our universe that we know.

Time, space, and darkness. God Himself did not and does not need these or any other thing that governs the nature of our universe to exist. He never has and never will. He is Father of light, beyond time, beyond space. He made these things for us and for His glory. He is obsessed with us that we might become obsessed with Him. And God's obsessive preoccupation with humanity doesn't seem to change throughout the entirety of the Bible or history for that matter. He remains wholeheartedly fixated on us. God's infinite grace was displayed on the very first day in creating something at all. And it never stopped. Time, space, and darkness may end with this present universe. God's love and grace won't.

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# A Book Review: Free Will Revisited

I tend to talk about Dr. Robert Picirilli in sycophantic tones. I suppose it is hard not to come across that way even though I am sincere in my praise of him and his influence in my life. I actually had him as a professor at a small school with intimate classes. Beyond that, he has been humble enough to answer my emails about Greek long after I graduated. And then there's his published works, which have a special place on my bookshelves.

I've read all of his works at least once, and *Grace, Faith, Free Will* at least 20 times—mostly because it takes many, many readings for a man like me to absorb the fire hydrant of material. And even then I do not think I understand it all. Anytime I feel like I'm getting a little too proud of my intelligence, one chapter of that book will bring me down a notch.

So it was with great joy my Senior Pastor told me not to buy Dr. Picirilli's new book, *Free Will Revisited*, because he already had a copy for me. And despite it being a slim 135 pages, it still took me days to get through it. Because this treatment of a crucial difference between two major branches of orthodox Christianity cannot be discussed simplistically. The reasoning gets into deep waters at times. I will be rereading.

I want to say up front that yet again, just as with *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, Picirilli goes to admirable lengths to make sure he presents his opponents views accurately and fairly. Like a champ, he takes on three of the heaviest weights of the last 500 years of church history in Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. And he spends probably 35-40% of the book trying to express their views in their own words.

There are no straw men being batted down. In stark contrast to the Social Media Debate Generation, Picirilli reads to understand, articulates the other position, and does not jump quickly to his responses. And by all means note the subtitle of this book is a “respectful” response to Luther, Calvin, and Edwards. I implore all of us to take a note from Picirilli’s format and approach. Listen or read carefully. Do not misrepresent your opponent’s views. Be humble and respectful.

As far as the content itself, there are times where Picirilli makes a more simple and straightforward argument against the writings of these three men opposing human free will. As when he notes that it is very difficult to get around teaching that God coerces us if we believe our will is completely against God prior to salvation and that God by his grace changes our will to His. Yet there are other times Picirilli shows how complex the debate can get, as on pages 86-87 when he talks about how things that are certain are not “necessary” and how God’s knowledge of the future is like our knowledge of the past. He dealt with this in the early part of *Grace, Faith, Free Will* but I believe Picirilli to be a very self-aware man, knowing that many of his readers would have read that volume and in my opinion avoids rehashing that part of his previous book but instead explains it with a fresh perspective.

[In the past I have written for REO on Arminius’s own words and how much overlap there is to Calvinism and Arminianism.](#) I did so based on what my professors, like Picirilli, have taught me. Here again, he accomplishes the same goal. He does not cite Arminius yet he still makes the point plainly and necessarily that Arminians believe that man is totally depraved, that God draws us to Himself by grace, that man does zero to contribute to his salvation in a way that could be called “works” and that God is completely sovereign over all creation, including human will. The difference lies, in large part, on the focus of the book. Do Christians accept salvation like a drowning man who realizes he cannot swim and chooses to

take a rope to save him or are they saved completely void of any free, self-determined choice?

Tribalism can be dangerous in politics and Christianity. I consider myself an Arminian because I think the doctrines are important. Yet I attended a Calvinist seminary, have close Calvinist friends and will gladly lock arms with them in worship and ministry any day. But I consider this topic important enough to read and write about a couple of times a year. And I am thankful yet again to Dr. Picirilli for the impetus to think about, react to and create in the sphere of theology. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to have their mind stretched, even if it is by Jonathan Edwards more so than Robert Picirilli. Because the point of the book is to debate, not pontificate. I only wish the other three men were alive to respond.

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## Memories (Part 2)

As I continue to recall memories, I should point out that these are selective and representative. There are many more, but these stand out to illustrate the faithfulness of God in both good and bad times. (Read Part One [here](#).)

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### The Sweet Fellowship of College

“Yesterday, Today, Forever” was a medley of songs popular during my college years at the Free Will Baptist Bible College, [1. Welch College now.] that we dorm students would sing during informal gatherings. One evening, around 1970 or 1971, as the students frequently did, we’d gathered in front of the sliding curtain opening into the dining hall (where

the student lounge and later "Common Grounds" were) about five minutes to six, and as was often the case, we started to sing:

*Yesterday, Today, Forever Jesus is the same.*

*All may change, but Jesus never, glory to His name!*

*Glory to His name, glory to His name.*

*All may change but Jesus never, glory to His name!*

*Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.*

*Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.*

*Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss*

*Walking down streets of purest gold, living in a land where  
we'll never grow old.*

*Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss*

*I like Bible College down here, but Heaven is better than,  
Heaven is better than*

*Heaven is better than this.*

*This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through*

*My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.*

*The angels beckon me to Heaven's golden shore,*

*And I can't feel at home in this world any more.*

*More, more about Jesus, more, more about Jesus*

*More of His saving fullness see, more of His love who died for  
me.*

*It's me, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer*

*It's me, it's me oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.*

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that calls me from  
a world of care*

*And bids me at my Father's throne make all my wants and wishes  
known.*

*In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found  
relief*

*And oft escaped the tempter's snare, by thy return, sweet hour  
of prayer.*

With a key word, one song would flow into the next:  
name...name, Heaven...Heaven,

This...this, more...more, and prayer...prayer. That particular night, though, as we approached the final song, there seemed to be a holy hush, a sense of God's Spirit. The curtain came open well before the end. The dining hall hostess stood there smiling. She didn't hush our singing and call for someone to ask the blessing right away. Instead, she joined us as we finished out the medley with the the beautiful and poignant "Sweet Hour of Prayer," and then we prayed and went into the dining hall to eat. A beautiful moment, a precious memory, which to me highlights the camaraderie, the sweet fellowship, the closeness of our student body during our unforgettable college years.

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### **First Visit to Cuba**

It was the summer of 1986. We had just come home from our second term in Panama to begin stateside assignment. Brother Eugene Waddell, who had recently been named as General Director of Free Will Baptist Foreign Missions, called me, and

asked me if I would go with him to Cuba to be his interpreter/translator. I felt greatly honored to be asked to go. Over the years, we had met a number of our FWB people from Cuba who migrated to Panama en route to the United States. I'd heard so much about the country and the church there. In addition, visits from the US to Cuba were very infrequent, and no one from the Mission office had gone in nearly thirty years.

It was one of the most unforgettable weeks of my life. We were in Pinar del Río, at the site where the seminary had operated for almost 20 years up until the time of the Cuban revolution. Since that time it had been closed, and the government would not allow the seminary to reopen. Eugene Waddell spoke several times during the youth camp we were attending; the FWB Church in Cuba was still permitted to use the facility for camps and conventions. Never have I seen such anointing or heard such pertinent messages as those he brought that week. His messages from the book of Daniel, and how God used this young man and his three friends as witnesses in a foreign, hostile culture, tremendously blessed and encouraged our Cuban brothers and sisters, especially the youth.

We laughed, we cried, we worshipped, and we forged friendships that would last for a lifetime and into eternity. There were also strategic discussions and the working out of a viable strategy for the Mission to again become involved in the life of the Cuban church, but in a healthy way that would honor our brothers and not create unhealthy dependency. What has resulted in Cuba these past 30 years owes much to the wisdom God gave to Bro. Waddell and Bro. Gilberto Díaz, who was president of the Cuban Association.

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### **The 1989 US Invasion of Panama**

Things had been hot and chaotic in Panama since 1987, when

frequent demonstrations started taking place against the dictatorship that had ruled the country since October 1968. Then, in early 1988, the U.S. froze Panamanian assets in an effort to force dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega to step down, and charged him with drug trafficking and other illegal activities. Banks closed, and we had difficulty getting money to even buy groceries. Things calmed down a bit, but then in May, 1989, after Noriega had the presidential election annulled when it was evident that the opposing candidate had one, violence erupted, and images of Guillermo Endara and Guillermo "Billy" Ford beaten and bloodied by Noriega's thugs flashed across the television screen. The tension grew almost daily.

Judy shares the following memory:

*Since public transportation was so difficult during this time, one afternoon, I decided to take our friend Lola to a bus stop closer to her house so she wouldn't have to wait for hours. We were chatting in the car as we arrived to the area called San Miguelito. Suddenly, we were in the middle of a political demonstration. The traffic was totally stopped. I looked around. There was a river of cars in front of us, behind us and on both sides. The angry mob was shouting, "Kill the Gringos, kill the Gringos." There was no escape. The car had tinted windows, thank the Lord, because one protester approached my car and laid his AK-47 right on the hood and continued to shout! Lola was praying like there was no tomorrow and I was saying a few prayers myself. Just as suddenly as we found ourselves in this horribly frightening situation, it seemed like God parted the Red Sea. That river of cars opened up and I didn't wait to see if the traffic light was red or green. I gunned it and we were out of there safe and sound. Only God could do that!*

There were a couple of coup attempts to have Noriega step down, which failed and resulted in Noriega's men being killed. October and November slowly went, the tension growing, and no

one knowing what might happen. Noriega shook a machete in the face of the United States, and declared Panama to be in a state of war. It was now late December, Christmas season, stores crowded with customers and their Christmas merchandise.

December 20, 12:00 a.m.: My family and I – our three boys were there with us, ages 14, 12, and 8 – will never forget “Operation Just Cause.” The bombing, the strong military presence for weeks that followed, the terrible Friday, December 22 following the Wednesday a.m. invasion; a day of looting as people ransaked the stores, including those nearby us, and carried things up the street in front of our house. Everyone was concerned that once the stores were wiped out, looters would start breaking into homes. That night, by common consent, believers set a time to pray and call upon the Lord for His protection. I’ll never forget when the prayer time ended, at that very moment, we heard the first U.S. helicopters passing over the neighborhoods, and heard that a curfew had been instituted! We were able to sleep in peace, in spite of the uncertainty. The next day, we saw the first troops, patrolling the city. Things began to quickly calm down.

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### **Parents’ Home-going**

These memories, though separated by over 25 years, have special significance: the passing of our parents, their departing this earth on their Heavenly journey. My dad died in 1981, after a year and a half struggle with pancreatic and liver cancer. He was not quite 70, and I was only 31 when he left us. We are thankful he lived longer than the doctors’ had predicted, and enjoyed several months relatively pain-free. Judy’s mom, Lillian Hovis, left us in 1993, at age 68. She had taken care of Judy’s dad, who had lived in declining health for some time, when she was stricken with pancreatic and liver cancer in 1992. In less than a year, she was gone. That left

Judy's dad, who lived for almost three years after his wife of 46 years was taken. He passed in 1996, at home. My mom suffered from Alzheimer's for more than 8 years, before the Lord took her home in 2007.

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These very selective memories, spread over a period of 30 plus years, show God's love, faithfulness, protection, and comfort. From a precious, unforgettable moment of fellowship and camaraderie, to the Holy Spirit's mighty working among believers in Cuba, to God's hand of protection during a time of uncertainty and danger, to His comfort as we said our earthly goodbyes to those we love, He was there!

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## **My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation**

**He had a promise.**

The LORD had given him assurance – he would see the Messiah before his death.

Simeon lived with something more than hopeful expectation. He knew. As firm as the ground beneath his feet – he knew.

All his years of righteous devotion found their ultimate reward when he saw that face. That small, innocent face.

The Christ child. The light and revelation to the world. And

so he proclaimed for all to hear:

“My eyes have seen your salvation.”

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### **She was nothing.**

She was lowly and humble, yet the LORD had chosen her among all women.

Mary had nothing to offer but her obedience and praise. When the Maker of the world became the fruit of her womb, she responded in the only manner that made sense:

“My soul magnifies the Lord.”

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### **He was a prophecy.**

His life had been ordained from beyond his birth. He was the voice crying out in the wilderness making straight the way of the Lord.

In the womb, John jumped for joy when his Lord drew near. In life, he proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom. When he saw his Savior approach, he gave witness of all that had been made known to him:

“Behold, the Lamb of God!”

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### **What about us?**

We are faced with unspeakable evil every day. We are confronted with injustice, pride, greed, and apathy. The world is broken, seemingly beyond repair.

But we have seen the Lamb of God. He has been revealed to us

in our lowly state. The darkness of our lives has been transformed by the truth and love of the great Light of the world. Our broken ways have been made straight. Our souls magnify the Lord for we have seen with our eyes His salvation.

**But it cannot end there.**

We are now faced with the same truths and the same impetus at Simeon, Mary, and John. Now that we have seen salvation with our eyes, it is for us to share this good news of great joy to the world. Our sins have been washed by the blood of the Lamb of God, so it is for us to proclaim his coming. We have been visited by the Great I AM, so our souls magnify the Lord.

We, who have been given this greatest gift, are now the gift-givers. We carry the light to a world stumbling in the darkness. We cry out to the lost that the Lamb of God has come and salvation is here. We live lives of praise to the only one who is worthy. How can we do anything less? Our eyes have seen His salvation and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior!

Merry Christmas from Rambling Ever On!

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## **Truth as White as Snow**

While baby Jesus might have looked and acted like other human babies, He was more than just a human baby. He was God Himself. God the Father had sent Jesus, God the Son, not to do away with everything He said in the Old Testament, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). In other words, He came to be the physical representation and embodiment of God's Word (John 1).

He is and was the Word, the Truth of God.

## What is Truth?

Truth. We know that Jesus embodied it but what exactly is it? Let's look at it a bit, shall we? Truth is simple and complicated at the same time. Many things are true: Snow is white, trees are wooden, and stars twinkle, to name a few. Every true thing on earth involves finiteness, things that will fail at some point no matter what. But the truth, the truth of God's word, is an infinite truth. It always has been and always will be. When people fail to find the truth that never fails, it is no wonder they get disillusioned with life. The story of Pontius Pilate is a perfect example of that. The biblically recorded encounter between Jesus and Pilate took place in either A.D. 30 or 33. In particular, among the Gospel accounts, the book of John provides some interesting details about the conversation between Pilate and Jesus. If you read between the lines, the conversation reveals that Pilate was tense and a bit disillusioned at the time. This disillusionment is highlighted by the last exchange. Here it is in all of its glory:

“Pilate, therefore, said unto him, Art thou a king then?  
Jesus  
answered, Thou sayest I am the king. To this end was I  
born,  
and for this cause came I into the world, that I should  
bear  
witness unto the truth, Everyone that is of the truth  
heareth  
my voice.  
Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?”

That was the very last thing he said to Jesus. It was obviously a rhetorical question. This was a question that he didn't really think there was a good answer too. It also

highlights his disillusionment and stress. It is easy to see why if you look at his political standing. Let's start with the current Roman Emperor of that time: Tiberius. Tiberius became the emperor of the Roman Empire in 14 A.D. In 26 A.D. he temporarily semi-retired to an island named Capri, leaving a man named Sejanus as his co-regent in charge of controlling the affairs of Rome in his absence. Sejanus instituted an anti-Semitism rule and Pilate, his appointee to Judea, carried it out. And as prefect of Judea he was positioned to do so.

But Sejanus' run as the top dog came to a hard end. In 31 A.D., two years prior to Jesus' trial, Sejanus was executed for attempting to seize complete power. For the next two years, a witch hunt of sorts went down in which all who might have been his co-conspirator were sought for execution. Pilate would have been in a very tenuous position at this point and would not have wanted to do anything politically that would stir the already troubled waters.

In addition, Tiberius' was already on the alert where Israel was concerned. He had realized the falsehood of many of Sejanus' claims against the Jews and therefore ordered that their persecution cease.

Poor Pilate. Poor confused, disillusioned, Pilate. That which he had considered truth was either dead or dying. And so, disgruntled, Pilate had asked Jesus, "What is truth?" The search for truth has become a self-centered pastime. Many people are looking for the comfortable, most desirable thing to be "truth" for them. Whatever is personally most desirable is true to many.

So what exactly is truth? Many non-Christians will say that truth is whatever one thinks it is, that it's completely subjective and different from person to person (relativism). Some of them will say that all is truth, that nothing is untrue. In other words, truth is found inside ourselves and we can only rely on ourselves for the truth while at the same

time accepting as equally valid the beliefs of others.

## **Believing the Truest Truth in the Universe**

Our believing or not believing in something does not make it either true or not true. It is still either one of these things no matter what. But it is still important that we do believe in the truth, particularly the truth of Jesus Christ. It is crucial that we recognize that He is the Truth, the most important truth in the universe.

When we say believing in and on the Truth of Jesus, it needs to be more than just a casual acceptance of the fact of Him. And it is a belief that needs to equate to a full, 100% acceptance in every situation for the rest of your life. This is not like saying you kind of believe something, but admitting that you don't really know if it's true or not. The Truth of Jesus demands that our belief takes the opposite extreme, that we know that He is the truth as surely as we know that snow is white.

The Truth of Jesus is infinitely important because it is an eternally saving truth. Those who have not heard and accepted the Truth, aren't entirely reliable sources. They might be smart people as far as worldly matters, but not having the one Truth with them is a pretty big deal. Pilate's problem was that he looked for truth in the form of Sejanus, a guy who was all able ambition and power. When this false truth failed, Pilate despaired of any truth at all. What a pity that he didn't listen more closely to Jesus, God incarnate.

In the preceding verse, Christ had told him that He had come into the world to tell the truth, that all who heard Him heard the truth. Pilate clearly didn't follow up his rhetorical question with any investigation into the matter, because he apparently ended things without any hope. Three years later Pilate was relieved of his position. Tradition says that

shortly after returning to Rome he killed himself.

Christianity was not founded by a fallen man but by Jesus the God-Man, the God who existed before the beginning, the God who created all mankind and all the universe. This is the Truth that came to earth on that night over 2000 years ago.

(Editor's Note: A version of this article originally appeared in Spring 2007 issue of Clear Living for [Randall House Publications](#).)

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## 5 Truths About the Diversity of the First Christmas

0 Christmas, do you ever remind us that people think their way of talking, writing, and celebrating is *the* way. Christmas starts quarrels over minutia more than all of the rest of the holidays combined. From what phrases to say to when to listen to music, we ironically turn this allegedly peaceful time of the year designed to put our focus on the birth of the most significant person ever into a self-aggrandizing time of opinions and disagreements. I realize many of these things are not meant to be taken too seriously (I honestly do not care if you consider *Die Hard* a Christmas movie) but if we are honest, we know that we get disproportionately passionate in defending some traditions.

If we study the first Christmas, we find that it was quite diverse. And I have no doubt an application to this is that we really need to realize that diversity matters to God. Much of (and dare I say most of) our way of "doing" Christmas are not

absolute truths to be followed and argued. And it may be that these silly differences of opinion about Christmas represent bigger and more serious issues we have with a lack of diversity in things things that do matter. Like worship and community life.

With that in mind, here are five things about the first Christmas and its diversity that can teach us to embrace the differences we have with others.

### **The worshippers were diverse**

Mary was a young virgin. Joseph was a carpenter descended from King David. The Magi were astrologers and may have been kings. The first group of people commanded to go see Jesus were laity shepherds. Zechariah was a priest and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. Anna was a very elderly prophetess. Matthew, an author, was a Jewish tax collector. Luke was a Gentile doctor. The messengers from God to man about Jesus were angels and not even human. And I'd even include the animals as well, since their feeding trough is mentioned by name in the story.

The voices of Christmas are far more diverse than were are accustomed to in our lives. Perhaps Christmas should awaken us to this fact and motivate us to long to hear from a variety of sources on how to understand and serve Jesus. And it could be very edifying to worship with a diverse community and buck against the typical cultural model of a church filled with people as similar to me as possible.

### **The reactions were diverse**

The Angels comforted Mary and the shepherds, both of whom were terrified. The shepherds told people about Jesus and glorified

God. Mary pondered the events deeply and treasured them in her heart. The magi bowed down to worship and brought gifts. Anna, Zechariah and Simeon gave prophecies. Simeon held Jesus in his arms. John the Baptist leaped in his mother's womb. Elizabeth gave a glad cry.

How we react to the Christmas season may seem so important to us that we expect others to feel similarly. When in fact there are many ways to react to Christmas and if they do not have anything to do with gift-giving or Santa or even huge family gatherings, they can still be good. As long as they are legitimate reactions to who Jesus is.

### **The geography was diverse**

Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. After his birth they went to Egypt for a while and then back to Nazareth where he was raised. The Magi were from "the East" and while it is impossible to say for sure where exactly that meant, it was a long distance from Galilee.

The lady who leads the prayer time at my church on Sunday mornings before Sunday school often brings requests from magazines that talk about places and people I have never heard of. I appreciate this instead of always just praying for our church, our neighborhood or our missionaries. God is indeed a God of the whole world and even Christmas reminds us of that.

### **The prophecies of Jesus as Savior were diverse**

Jesus's name means "Jehovah is salvation" so centering the idea of Christmas around "Jesus is our Savior" is perfect. Yet even that phrase was broken down theologically that first Christmas. Consider just in Zechariah's song in Luke 1:67-80 that he teaches, among other things, that Jesus would be:

## *A Redeemer*

This is a word that in and of itself has layers of meaning. A first century Jew who knew their Scriptures could think of Ruth, Job or even Levitical law and understand that Zechariah meant that God sent Jesus to rescue us from spiritual slavery and that in some way he was going to purchase us for God out of our pathetic circumstances. As a family-redeemer. This explains why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6 that “you were bought at a price” and in Acts 20 he claimed the church was “purchased by the blood Christ”.

## *A Warrior King*

The literal phrase Zechariah used was “horn of salvation” which is found in several places in his Scriptures to communicate victory over enemies and security and refuge. Combine this with the fact that Zechariah references David, the general king who led Israel to many war victories, some translations call Jesus “a mighty king” in this prophecy.

The Jesus of the Gospels did get angry and even violent (Mark 11) but he came to die and was a willing sacrifice who did not fight back against his human enemies. Yet to Zechariah’s audience, they knew that God was a Mighty Warrior King, as in Isaiah 42:13:

The Lord will go forth like a warrior,  
He will arouse His zeal like a man of war.  
He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry.  
He will prevail against His enemies.

And then Revelation describes Jesus this way:

“And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His name is The Word of

God. The armies which are in heaven were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

We know from the New Testament that our enemies are not other humans. They are Satan, sin and death. And that Christ came to conquer them all. I think the resurrected Jesus is very much an image of the Old Testament Triumphant Warrior God and also of King David the War General, not victorious over the Philistines or Assyrians but over evil forces of darkness and over physical and spiritual death. And I think Zechariah prophesies this. The doctrine of the first Christmas goes much deeper than the incarnation and the image of baby Jesus.

*Our covenant.*

Zechariah referenced Abraham, which was the covenant he knew at the time, but we now know a covenant that is better and forever in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:15).

*A light to all nations.*

Darkness has a strong association with secrecy and wickedness and confusion. All of these things were true of most nations spiritually before Christ. But he came to bring knowledge of not mere morality but of salvation to God for everyone.

And there are more I could discuss. But what all of these phrases have in common is that they describe Jesus as Savior in terminology that demonstrates how profound, complex and marvelous that phrase is.

## **The object of worship was not diverse**

And this is the most important thing of all. It is easy in our culture to bow down to diversity so far that we consider all beliefs and religions equal. And while I do not unnecessarily disrespect any belief or worldview, I without shame proclaim Jesus Christ as my Lord and God, the only means to get to God and the unique object of my worship. Christianity is exclusive by its nature because of Jesus, as any monolithic religion is and as all truth claims have to be in some sense. Christianity is significant not for how inclusive it is of all beliefs, but rather how distinct it is. It desires to be inclusive of all *people*, notably all types of people and the New Testament reiterates this over and over. Yet the way to Heaven is narrow. Jesus is the only door.

No matter your traditions this Christmas, the original story is exhaustively about Jesus and his role in human history. It wasn't just a birth. It was a collision of God and humanity that changed everything that matters in eternity.

As always, we welcome feedback in the comment section below.

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## **REO Gives Thanks**

Thanksgiving.

At its best, this is a day to show our gratitude to God for everything He is and everything He has done. It is also an opportunity to reflect on all the little, seemingly insignificant blessings in our lives. Spiritual or mundane.

Eternal or earth-bound – we all have so much for which to say “thank you.” We hope that you have a fantastic Thanksgiving and that you take some time to recognise the Giver of all good things.

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## Ben Plunkett



Most of the time when you ask someone to say what they are thankful for at Thanksgiving time they will name stuff like God, family, good food, and a warm home. These are very great things to be thankful for and I truly am. However, this Thanksgiving I want to highlight a little something that is usually forgotten: Seasonal changes. That’s right. I’m thankful for seasonal changes. It fights mundaneness. Although I don’t love all four seasons, some more, all of them have unique things to appreciate.

Fall is easily my favorite, so I love it for all four months. There are so many reasons why I love fall. The colors, the increasing coolness, Thanksgiving, and yada, yada, yada. The list rambles on and on. Plus, some of the best parts of the Lord of the Rings takes place during the fall. (I don’t know if that’s true. Totally made it up.)

I do appreciate winter though—for a few hours. No, really, I do think there is beauty in trees without any leaves. And the snow, when and if it comes, as annoying and inconvenient as it can get is also beautiful. It does not take me long to tire of winter, though. Most of it is dreary days of scratch-out-your-eyes boredom and stagnancy. Really, I can think of very few things that I really like that come in winter. There’s Christmas, of course, which barely comes in winter. That is one of its few saving graces.

The sunniness and greenness and growth of spring is a welcome change. While I don't love it with all of my heart like fall, I like it a lot. We like to think that spring is a time of sunny wonder when we prance with happy bunnies through fields of red and blue flowers. Yeah, that doesn't happen. Ever. There are taxes, though. We can prance with all those forms and stuff. Anyway, I enjoy spring for approximately three and a half months and then I want fall to be here.

But before we can get to that, we have to get through summer, my second least favorite season. Summer is fine and dandy if you can stay inside the majority of the time. But then you have to go outside doing all this "fun stuff" and you just end up getting all tired and sweaty with mosquito bites and sunburn welts and greasy, disheveled hair. However, I do appreciate this seasonal change as well. I give it six weeks and then fall better be getting here soon or else.

This blurb may make it seem like I am only thankful for fall rather than seasonal change in general, but I really am thankful for all of the seasonal changes. It's all about variety. In Tennessee and in many other parts of the world, all the seasons have defined changes. While I like some of the changes and seasons a lot better than others, I am thankful for the variety of a typical year.

Many of my REO comrades agree with me about fall, by the way, you can see our collective diatribe [here](#).

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**Phill Lytle**



To keep with the spirit of Thanksgiving, I am thankful for times of feasting. While I love food (as is evidenced by my profile picture) this is not really about the food. It's about what happens around a table with friends and loved ones. Some of my favorite memories happened sitting around the table, eating good food, and spending time with people I care about.

One particular moment that comes to mind was when we had most of the active REO writers and contributors to my house for a Christmas party. It was a beautiful and heart-warming time. I mean that seriously. My heart felt warmed and full by the end of the night. I was as content as I have ever been.

Another memory that will never leave me is a visit to a Japanese conversation partner's host family's home while I was in college. We ate delicious Japanese cuisine, talked, laughed, and then spent the rest of the evening around the fireplace listening to the host father transfix us with story after story.

This Thanksgiving, my family is coming to my house. My parents will be here. My older brother and his family will be here. And my Chinese "daughter" will be here as well. The food will be great – of this I have no doubt. The time spent together, talking, laughing, and feasting on all that God has done in our lives will be even better. I am and always will be thankful for times like that.

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**Gowdy Cannon**



Something out of the way of faith and family that I am very thankful for is fantasy literature. And notably, I am thankful for my wife and REO for influencing me to read several classic works that turned me into a fan. More than TV and movies, a good fantasy book really stirs my heart and mind at the same time.

It goes beyond entertainment to me. I have no doubt I am a better preacher because of fantasy literature. Just this past Sunday I was preaching about how God works in spite of injustice and is going to right all wrongs one day and out of nowhere I blurted out “Aslan is on the move!” And I appreciated a few people in the crowd nodding and smiling in response.

I also have no doubt reading about humans, dwarves, elves, and hobbits becoming a fellowship has very creatively kept a vision in my mind of what a church can be with ethnic diversity. I would love to have a church filled with English, Spanish and Polish speakers together on a spiritual journey with a common goal. And Tolkien ignites my imagination when I read him.

And then there is just the way my wife and I bond over fantasy literature. We’ve talked about books, watched movies and even taken trips to London and Orlando just because J.K. Rowling wrote a fantasy world, good vs. evil epic.

I’m very thankful for the color that these books add to my life, my marriage, and my ministry.

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**Debbi Atwood Sexton**



I am thankful for Starbucks blonde roast, unsweetened, mellow and soft cold brew coffee.

Years ago, I fell in “like” with iced coffee and since then, I’ve spent countless dollars on little glass bottles of Starbucks frappes. After I realized that I had spent about \$2,751.00 on those little bottles, I tried making it myself! Not great, but I drank it anyway because of, you know, money. Eventually, I fell off the wagon and started buying the bigger bottles! At this point, I was an addict and figured there was no AA for coffeeholics.

However, God is all-knowing, all-wise, all-seeing and He cares about our life’s crises! Someone, somewhere, with the help of the Holy Spirit, no doubt, had the brilliant idea to stock the shelves with Starbucks cold brew that costs under \$5.00 for 6-8 servings!! It has rocked my world. I can now have iced coffee every morning for a fraction of the price of those little bottles of liquid gold. My wallet, my bank account and my husband are extremely happy!!

“The only thing I know for sure about today is coffee. Everything else is just wild speculation.” – Nanea Hoffman

In case you didn’t know, coffee has a spiritual origin!!

C.O.F.F.E.E

Christ Offers Forgiveness to Everyone Everywhere

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We are handling the end of the week a little differently. If you are a regular reader, you know that on Fridays we publish The Five. As today and tomorrow most of us at REO, as well as most of our readers, are busy with friends, family, and loved ones, we have opted to combine our Thanksgiving feature with The Five, except it will not be published on Friday. Instead, we are running it today.

As you may have noticed, there are only four blurbs above. This is where you come in. In the comment section below tell us what you are thankful for. It can be something serious or it can be something as simple, yet life-changing, as indoor plumbing. Without you, this is just The Four that was published on the wrong day, and that would not be cool at all. So, lend a hand, help us out, and make this the greatest REO article ever!

Happy Thanksgiving!

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## **Five Theological Sounding Words Christians Should Know and Use**

In the 15 years of being a pastor and preacher in Chicago, I don't think I have ever one time used the word "Justification" in a sermon. Or "Sanctification". I believe the concepts they entail are necessary to teach but I have always felt that they could be heavy to my audience and I am comfortable explaining

them with other words.

That is not the case with all of the “Christian-ese” the American church has. There are some words I do not want to erase from my vocabulary in an effort to make the Bible easier to understand. I believe there are some words that have no good synonyms and are so rich in meaning that the church does well to learn and use them. Because you can’t find anything equivalent in secular vocabulary. Christianity has concepts and truths unequaled and unparalleled in the world.

As always I seek balance. I don’t want to talk completely in esoteric jargon as a Christian but neither do I want to try to be so hip with my lingo I eliminate all theological terms entirely. And I will say up front that your list may be different than mine. I am not claiming this is the “correct” list on this topic. With that said, here are five I use:

## **1. Covenant**

I have written before that [I do not mind using the phrase](#) “Christianity isn’t a religion; it’s a relationship.” Yet the word “relationship” can be woefully inadequate when describing the relationship our God wants us to have with Him in Jesus Christ. I have a relationship with my uncle. But I don’t have a *covenant* relationship.

For millennia, through men like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, God has used this word to communicate how he enters into a relationship with men. And there are consistencies in all of their covenants: a promise on God’s part, a symbol or sign to confirm it and a response of a faithful commitment by the followers. It was a very serious relational pact to be entered into. It was not to be taken lightly. It was like a spiritual marriage.

Now through Jesus Christ we enter into a New Covenant, not

from the blood of lambs and goats, but through his blood. And we need to grasp the level and seriousness of the commitment that covenant is. No other word in English really captures it. "Marriage" is close but it carries too much in connotation. Yet man-woman marriage is supposed to be a picture of the God-man covenant commitment.

## **2. Atonement**

I have written about this before for REO when writing about [Leviticus for Good Friday in 2016](#). This word matters to teaching about Christian salvation and how we can enter into covenant with God. No other word (apart from the very similar "propitiation") in English carries so many layers in meaning and truth.

In general, in both Testaments, it has a threefold significance: a substitute is given in place of our sin, our sin is forgiven and God's wrath is satisfied. All three of these facts are crucial to our theology and faith. And God gave us a beautifully concise word to capture them together. We see it in Leviticus over and over, we see it change in the Gospels and we see that change explained in Romans and Hebrews. I love the Bible for how I marvel at how it is both consistent and simultaneously divided by a major transformation at the same time. Jesus is now the substitution (not animals) but God's wrath is still satisfied and my sins are still forgiven.

## **3. Evangelism**

Phrases like "Sharing your faith" and "Witnessing" are great but the word "Evangelize" literally means to preach or proclaim the Gospel. And that is our message. I would put "Gospel" as one of the five words but it has such a deep, rich and multi-faceted meaning it cannot be treated in a short

paragraph. Yet I will mention [I still agree with REO contributor David Lytle](#) when he expands the definition of Gospel to the entirety of the content of four books we have on Jesus's life and not something as simple as "The Gospel is that Jesus died for your sins and rose again."

Regardless of what Gospel means, we are mandated to share it and we have a ready-made verb to communicate that mandate. Phrases like "Preach the Gospel" conjure up ideas of standing on a stage in front of a crowd. "Evangelism" has less baggage, in my opinion (though the word "Evangelical" may have a ton of baggage).

#### **4. Lamenting**

I suppose this is a word that we hear in English outside of church, but not very often. Yet the Bible has a form of this word as the name of one of its books, which is significant to me.

Christians should know how to lament. And the importance of it. Jeremiah is called the "weeping prophet" and Jesus was a "man of sorrows and familiar with the deepest suffering". Over 60 of the Psalms can be labeled "Lament Psalms". And in both testaments over and over God's people are commanded to weep and wail and all manner of similar verbs (Isaiah 22:12, James 4:9).

But I think there is a theological significance to the word "Lament". I believe it teaches us how to process the horror that comes from both the evil in the world and in our hearts in a God-honoring and proactive way, instead of a reactive state that similar English words convey.

#### **5. I AM**

This one is different and not just because it's two words. It's because it's not a verb or a noun like the others. It is in some way a name for God that connects Old Testament YHWH (another name Christians should know) and New Testament Jesus Christ.

The significance of Jesus saying in John 8:58 that "before Abraham was, I AM" is monumental. They started to stone him for it because his opponents knew he was claiming what YHWH claimed in Exodus 3:14-15. Outside of how fascinating it is that here Jesus claims to be outside of time and that he cannot be restricted by human logic or the grammar of any language ("before Abraham was, I AM" is linguistically nonsensical in every language I have studied), Jesus saying "I AM" communicates a claim to and self-awareness of his deity. He knew perfectly Scriptures like Exodus 3:14-15 and Isaiah 42:8 and was intentional with his words.

There are many other "I AM" statements by Jesus and perhaps my favorite is in John 18:6 when a detachment of soldiers carrying torches and weapons went to arrest Jesus. He asked them whom they were looking for and they said, "Jesus of Nazareth". And he replied "I AM". Some translations add the word "he" as in "I am he" for clarity but I think it makes the meaning less clear. For when he said this phrase, they drew back and fell to the ground. No army in the world can stand up to the LORD of Heaven's Armies. I think there is power in this name of God as stated in Exodus. And Jesus being God in the flesh and using this name, humbled these men.

Are there theology words you feel similar about?

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# The Influence of Job in Modern Worship Music

I feel things deeply. And I'd definitely describe myself as a melancholy. That surely lends itself to why Job has been my favorite book of the Bible since 1999, my second year at Bible College.

And as a result I long for music that speaks to the darkest aspects of the human condition and how to deal with them. I could listen to the Caedmon's Call song "Center Aisle" – a haunting, depressing testimony [which I wrote about here](#) – on repeat. I have listened to Mark Schultz's "He's My Son" – written from the perspective of a parent whose child has leukemia – dozens of times. I have often said that The Fray's "You Found Me" has phrases you rarely hear Christians say...unless you read the Bible.

So when people look for ways to make verses and themes from Job into worship music, I am all ears. Even if not the dark aspects of the book. Job does, after all, speak clearly to themes of reconciliation and God's sovereignty. In the last twenty years, several Christian artists have drawn inspiration either directly or indirectly from Job's words, and God's words to Job. Today I want to celebrate a few examples.

## **"Though You Slay Me" (Shane and Shane)**

Taken directly from Job 13:15 where Job says, "Though you slay

me, yet will I hope," Shane and Shane has blessed the church with an extremely biblical and worshipful response to suffering. Also, they draw from chapter 19 when they write:

*My heart and flesh may fail*

*The earth below give way*

*But with my eyes, with my eyes I'll see the Lord*

This reference comes right after Job has declared that his Redeemer lives and at the end of time He will stand on the earth. The thought of this overwhelmed Job emotionally and hearing this lyric does the same for me. The mere thought of seeing Jesus one day with my physical eyes instead of by faith moves me to tears. It is with this thought that H.G. Spafford concluded "It Is Well".

"Though You Slay Me" is not upbeat or jovial. It doesn't make me happy when I hear it or sing it. Which I think is appropriate for a Job-inspired song. It also references God in Deuteronomy[1. Or perhaps Job 5:18, though I hope not] and quotes from Jesus in Gethsemane. And in all of these passages, there is a heaviness that cannot be avoided. "Worship" when we are suffering may mean cries of faith in spite of anguish and a heart that has been destroyed by our circumstances.

### **Blessed Be Your Name (Matt Redman)**

Taken directly from the fourth phrase in Job 1:21, Matt Redman develops Job's thought that no matter the circumstance he will bless God. Whether my world is filled with darkness or whether it's "all it should be" (always in quotes when I see it, producing a wink-at-the-reader effect of how our idea of what the world should be is not God's), my heart will choose say, "Blessed Be Your Name".

I love how the bridge of this song is the third phrase from

the same verse above. The two thoughts should not be separated.

Unlike “Though You Slay Me” when we do this song at my church in Chicago it is upbeat and positive and I think that is appropriate considering that Job spoke these lyrics before he descended into the abyss seven days after his tragedies.

### **Redeemer (Nicole C. Mullen)**

I don't know if any verse in Job is more important to me than 19:25 because I think it teaches that Jesus is resurrected, two millennia before it happened. And Nicole C. Mullen took that amazing prophecy and penned one of the great worship songs in the modern church canon.

And as with Shane and Shane, she didn't limit herself to one verse to tell the story. She speaks God's heart through his own words in Chapters 38-41 by talking about God's pride in his creation. The line “Who told the ocean you can only come this far?” is directly from Job 38:11 and other lyrics allude to this four-chapter speech by God as well.

This song also would be more uplifting than most of what Job would inspire but since it is a testimony to God's sovereignty over creation and death I think it's perfect. I appreciate the awe it conveys. It is a song that truly makes me think outside of myself, much the way God's discourse at the end of Job does. Center that around the most important Christian doctrine—the resurrection of Jesus—proclaimed in the most important Bible book on suffering, and you have a song that needs to be sung.

### **How He Loves (John Mark McMillan)**

This one is a bit of a stretch because there are no overt Job references and as far as I know John Mark McMillan has never

said that Job was an influence.

But I include it for two reasons. First, the song was written out of a painful time in McMillan's life, after his best friend died in a car accident. Secondly, he opens the song by claiming that God "loves like a hurricane" and that "I am a tree". Whether intentional or not, I will always think of Job 38:1 when I hear that. God didn't come to Job in gentleness as Jesus speaks in Matthew 11:28-29. He comes in a whirlwind. God brought a thunderstorm to Job's desired courtroom. And Job's pride was eradicated and his demand for justice was given a final verdict for all time: God is God and we are not.

Do I think this is God's love on display? Absolutely. God humbles because he loves and only accepts love from the humble. God's love isn't nice and pleasant all the time. As C.S. Lewis taught us, God isn't safe and he can be terrifying to our sensibilities. Job 38-41 proves that. And Job reacts exactly how God desires, by repenting in dust and ashes. This is a story, in part, of relational reconciliation. Which doesn't happen without love. Even love like a hurricane to a tree.

As always I'd love to hear from our readers about these songs or any others that you like on this subject. Please comment below!

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# We Have This Hope

Another day, another mass shooting.

Another day, another senseless act of violence and unspeakable evil.

How do we respond when the world around us feels like it is collapsing in front of our eyes? How do react when evil seems to triumph every day? Every hour? Every minute?

We are confronted with an almost unrelenting surge of evil – a tidal wave of horror stories and despicable acts. Acts that pierce our hearts with a bone-wearying sadness. Acts that just keep coming, over and over. We feel so overwhelmed, so broken, and so alone, that we feel nothing at all.

Or maybe that is just my response. I hesitate to speak for anyone else because we all process things differently, but based on conversations I have had, most of us fall somewhere within that range of emotions. We are horrified, sad, angry, and confused. We feel the onslaught of evil and we grieve. We grieve for those suffering the fullest effects of these profound demonstrations of depravity. We grieve because we feel helpless in all of it. We grieve because we know this level of wickedness is not something that can be contained by laws, regulations, or rhetoric. We grieve because our ability to grieve is slowly dying.

Where does this leave us? As the church, what should our answer be to the question of this great evil? From what I can see, we feel so very small in all of this. We feel alone and isolated. We are islands surrounded by darkness and death. To paraphrase one of my favorite films, *The Two Towers*, “What can we do against such reckless hate?”

I have many more questions than I have answers. I have no perfectly crafted words that will allow any of this to make

sense, to hurt less, or to move us more. What I have is likely insufficient, but as I have thought about all this over the past few days, and at various times prior to the most recent tragedy, I keep coming back to a few truths that have helped me. Perhaps they can help others as well.

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*I should seek the heart of God and respond as He responds.*

I never want to tell someone how they should react to anything and I hope I am not doing that now. That said, when the next random act of wanton violence occurs, even if I am numb from all the previous atrocities, I know I should be moved in some manner. Now, that will likely look different for me than it does for anyone else, but as a child of the King, it is my call to be like my Father and my Father is deeply moved when evil seems to rule the day. God grieves for the broken, the hurting, and the neglected. He champions the orphan and the widow (Psalm 147:3, Psalm 34:18). His example should move me to care, to respond, and to grieve, even when I don't feel like it. Even when I have been desensitized to the evil in our midst. I should seek the heart of God and respond as He responds.

Perhaps you are like many I have spoken to who feel so battered by the constant stream that you cannot seem to really care anymore. I've been there and in some ways, I am still there. One thing that I have noticed with my response, is that it is much more spiritually rewarding to avoid finger-pointing in the wake of a tragedy. I feel less and internalize less when I spend all of my energy blaming this person or that, this group or that, this worldview or that. I'm not saying there are no people, groups, or worldviews responsible for many of the most heinous acts we are witnessing. I'm simply stating that when I only point fingers at the monsters outside of my gate, I cloak myself in self-delusion and self-

righteousness. For each of us, “there but for the grace of God go I” should be a constant refrain. We are all capable of great evil. We are all susceptible to giving in to our fallen nature. That knowledge should spur us to repentance, thanksgiving, and grace. We shouldn’t hate those that do evil. We should mourn that sin has disfigured the image of God in their lives almost beyond recognition. We should long for renewal – of those that do this great evil but also of the world itself. These tragedies are stark reminders how far from the Kingdom the fallen world truly is and it should be our ever-present mission to bridge that gap.

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*Prayer should be our first response.*

Secondly, we need to pray. In today’s culture, that sounds so weak and inadequate and there are many who have responded with animosity and derision to calls for prayer. To the world at large, prayer is synonymous with naïveté and inaction, when the opposite is actually true. To a believer, prayer should be our first response. Our first defense. Our greatest and most powerful weapon. (I Chronicles 16:11, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Jeremiah 29:12, Matthew 5:44)

Prayer does not always come easily to me. Or better said, my prayer life is too self-focused and too limited. If you are like me and are active in your local church, you hear prayer requests often. I commit to pray for these requests and I almost always follow through. But my prayers are usually quick, little, one-and-done affairs. I fail, time and again, to go boldly to the throne of God with those requests. These times of tragedy remind me how flawed and undisciplined my prayer life usually is. I am convinced that if the body of Christ would commit to seeking the face of the Lord in an intense and focused manner, we would see God move in ways we cannot imagine. I am also convinced that we don’t pray that

way. If anything good can come from a tragedy like a mass shooting (and if you believe in an Omniscient and Omnipotent God you have to believe that He can use it for good) then perhaps believers falling on their knees in committed and fervent supplication will be the first step towards that.

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*We are never alone.*

Finally, we are never alone. A few paragraphs back, I mentioned how isolated these events can make us feel. We see example after example of humanity hurting, killing, and destroying and it convinces us that we are alone. That there is no remnant in the land to stem the tide. That is a lie from hell itself. A dangerous and powerful lie. Do not believe it. Regardless how you feel, how things appear, you are never alone.

I Kings 19 tells us the aftermath of the Mount Carmel story. The prophet Elijah has just experienced one of the most amazing and powerful displays of God's power. Elijah challenged the false prophets of Baal and the LORD answered by sending fire from heaven to show the land who the true King of Israel was. A short time later, Elijah is by himself, hiding in a cave, and he prays to God, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." He was convinced that he was the only faithful person left. Without reading too much into the passage, I've always wondered why Elijah felt this way. The Lord responds to him and tells him that there are 7,000 others that never bowed the knee to Baal. 7,000! I don't want to sound flippant, but it sounds like Elijah needed to find himself a good church home! He felt isolated in part because he had isolated himself. There are too many in our

society that do this as well. They do not connect with a local body of believers. They do not feel the need or importance of putting roots down in a local faith community. So when tragedy strikes, of course they feel alone.

But even bigger than that, when we are disconnected from the worldwide church, we do not see how God is moving outside of our small sphere of living. We might be plugged into our local body, but we still feel cut off from the larger body of Christ. In some ways we are islands, but each of our small islands are joined together by the life-stream of the blood of Christ. These horrific acts should spur us to stronger connections, clearer focus, and more passionate action. Our light should shine brighter. Our prayers should be bolder. The importance of building the Kingdom should stand in stark contrast to the darkness surrounding us. Our lives should be a constant and unified declaration of grace, hope, and love to a broken and fallen world.

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That's all I have so far. I wish I could write something that would help make sense of things. I can't. I'm still trying to figure out how to respond to the constant barrage myself. But these few things have helped me, so hopefully, they can help you. I'll leave you with the words from the writer of Hebrews. It's a powerful reassurance of our position and value to God. When life is chaos we have hope – a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. Let that be a comfort to you.

*So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. Hebrews 6:18 -19*