

PLAIN TRUTH[®]

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION[®]

LET'S MAKE A DEAL[®]

By Greg Albrecht

inside

Who Is God and What
Is He Like? p2

Healing Weary Words p4

Reflections in Pools p7

Quotes & Connections p8

The Art of the Deal

Striking a bargain or making a deal is one of the most fundamental activities in which human beings engage. In many areas of the world, if you shop in an open-air market, the sellers expect some bargaining. If you walk up to a shop or stall in such a market and merely pay the posted price, you take all the fun out of the transaction.

In many cultures, people with something to sell expect and enjoy bargaining. They assume everyone enjoys haggling.

When we, mere mortals, assume that since we like making deals, God must react in a similar way, we make a huge mistake! **God doesn't make deals.**

A deal is predicated on both parties having something the other party desires and/or needs. **We have nothing to offer God that he does not already have.** No individual is ever equipped to make a deal with God.

Because God already owns everything there is, we mortals are incapable of bargaining with him. Some might assume we can make a deal with God if we do lots of good deeds and then, because he really wants to love us but will not unless we earn it, our "deal" will enable God to love us.

NO! Bargaining or making deals with God is not the nature of the relationship he offers you and me.

One of the first deliberate attempts on our part to contact God is when we desperately need something from him. When we get into **real trouble from which there seems no way out, the first determined conversation** some of us have with God is all about making a deal. We want God to listen to us when our back is against the wall—when we have nowhere else to go—so we offer him something in return.

"You give me what I want, God, and I will give you something in return. Something for something—let's make a deal, God!"

You might have tried to bargain with God when you became acquainted with the person you felt was the love of your life. You decided that this was the person you wanted to marry, so you prayed to God, telling him that if he would just use his influence on

your intended love and somehow cause them to like you the way you liked them, then in return you would do whatever God wanted you to do.

We attempt to bargain with God during life and death situations—a well-known example being the *fox-hole prayer* during a time of war—"God, if you'll just get me out of this alive, I'll do whatever you want me to do."

Perhaps you have found yourself in the middle of a nightmare—you or a loved one has been given a diagnosis of terminal cancer. The natural inclination is to ask God to cut us a deal, to count up all of our good deeds and consider what we have done for him.

One lady expressed it this way. During a terminal illness she was terribly disappointed with God for not healing her as she had asked... "especially after all I have done for him."



Who is God and What is He Like?

BREAKING NEWS: God is who he is, not who we think he is because of what we have been taught. If you have created God in your own image, or wittingly or unwittingly allowed someone to help you do that then God will probably be a member of your church and denomination. He will keep and observe all your religious ceremonies, holidays and holy days, all your rules and regulations and all your rituals.

- God created in your image will hate the people you hate.
- God created in your image will vote for the person you vote for.
- God created in your image will be a member of your race, nationality and perhaps even your gender.

When God is created in our image, he turns into a god of the rule-book who insists on absolute compliance, more interested in punishing than comforting.

When God is created in our image, he always keeps religious rules and he is capable of being manipulated by what we do. We can earn and deserve favors from the gods humans create in their image.

Many churches preach the gospel of moral behavior and sin management on a regular basis. They preach threats and warnings about those who fail to behave properly, and the eternal, ever burning hell in which they will be tortured forever and ever, because they failed.

The gospel is not all about “here’s what’s wrong with the world” and here’s how we can fix it. The gospel is not all about “here’s what’s wrong with you” and how you

better fix your problems before it’s too late and God (because he loves you) sends you to hell to be tortured forever and ever.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is all about the goodness of God, not our failures, shame and guilt.

God is doing far more than merely producing good works in our lives—God is making us into a good work. *We ourselves are a good work—God’s good work.*

We ourselves are new men and new women in Christ. We are God’s temple—his house. We are under construction—*we are a work in process.* We are a new creation. *We are God’s reconstruction project.*

This is the secret of God’s grace—this is God’s end game. In our pride we try to convince ourselves that God will love us when we deserve it. In our pride we are easy fodder for religious institutions that will persuade us God will never love us unless and until we favorably measure up to all of the dictates, rules, dogmas and doctrines of that particular religion.

Who is God and what is he like? *God is exactly like Jesus, who came to fully reveal the heart, soul and essence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

The old covenant instructed Israel to love its neighbors but never seek a treaty of friendship with its enemies. In Matthew 5:43-44 Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

While the old covenant insists that God curses those who disobey him and blesses those who obey, in Matthew 5:45 Jesus says God does not discriminate with rain and sunshine. Those who are good and those who are evil both receive rain

and sunshine. In Matthew 5:46 we read that faith in Jesus transcends merely returning love to those who love us.

The blessings and favor of God are not directly linked with degrees of worthiness or unworthiness we demonstrate. We must not think of our relationship with God as being our pursuit of gaining his favor, of pleasing him and earning his approval.

When we in turn love others the way God loves us, we love as he loves...without regard to whether they deserve it or not.

The love with which we love others is a love we are passing on, it is God’s love given to us. Therefore, when we love those who do not love us, we will not feel spiritually superior or self righteous because the love we are giving originates with God. A Christ-follower will not triumphantly congratulate themselves by saying, “I love person X, even though person X doesn’t love me.”

Rather, the force of what a Christ-follower will say will go something like this: “God loves Person X and God loves me. God loves Person X even though Person X does not appear to love me. God enables me, by his grace and through his love, to pass on his love to Person X.”

Who is God and what is he like? *God is exactly like Jesus, who came to reveal the very essence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.* □

—Greg Albrecht

Join us for “Who is God and What is He Like?” at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of July 21, 2019.

Continued from page 1

There are many biblical examples of people attempting to bargain with God, but **these examples are not prescriptive**—they are merely examples of how people failed to comprehend the grace of our Lord.

The most well-known example of trying to make a deal with God is the time when Abraham tried to negotiate with God over the destruction of the city of Sodom (Genesis 18:16-33).

Abraham offered God a deal—he proposed that if he could find a certain number of righteous people in the city, then God would relent and save the entire city.

You know the story: Abraham kept on “working” God until he got him down to the lowest possible number.

Is this example of Abraham given to us in the Bible so that we will know how to make deals with God? No, it’s offered as an ironic and almost humorous example of how we humans often seriously misjudge God, thinking he is more like us than he actually is.

We can’t “work” God. We can’t fool him or trick him with our wheeling and dealing negotiations. God cannot be



Striking a bargain or making a deal is one of the most fundamental activities in which humans engage... In many cultures people with something to sell expect and enjoy bargaining. They assume everyone enjoys haggling.

manipulated—and we should be deeply thankful he cannot be, shouldn’t we? Thank God that God is not at all like us.

There are biblical examples when God fulfilled requests of people who bargained with him, but it’s a huge mistake to think that God did so because of what the people promised to do for him.

Who do we take God for anyway? Do we really think that God needs any of the rubbish or junk we have had in our attic or garage for thirty years?

I mean, come on, do we really think we have anything to offer God that he desperately wants so he would be inclined to start bargaining with us?

Why God Doesn’t Bargain

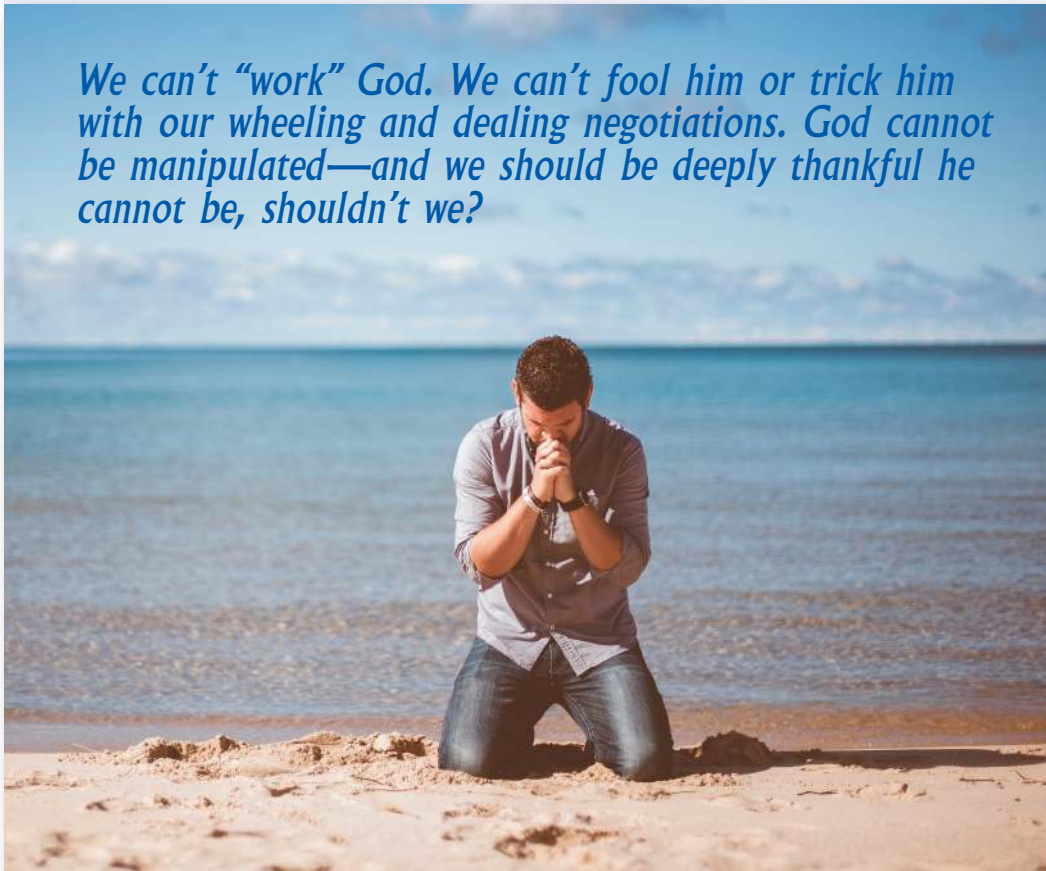
God’s grace is no bargain. God’s grace is a gift. God doesn’t do bargains. God doesn’t make deals, because we have nothing of value to offer him that he does not already have.

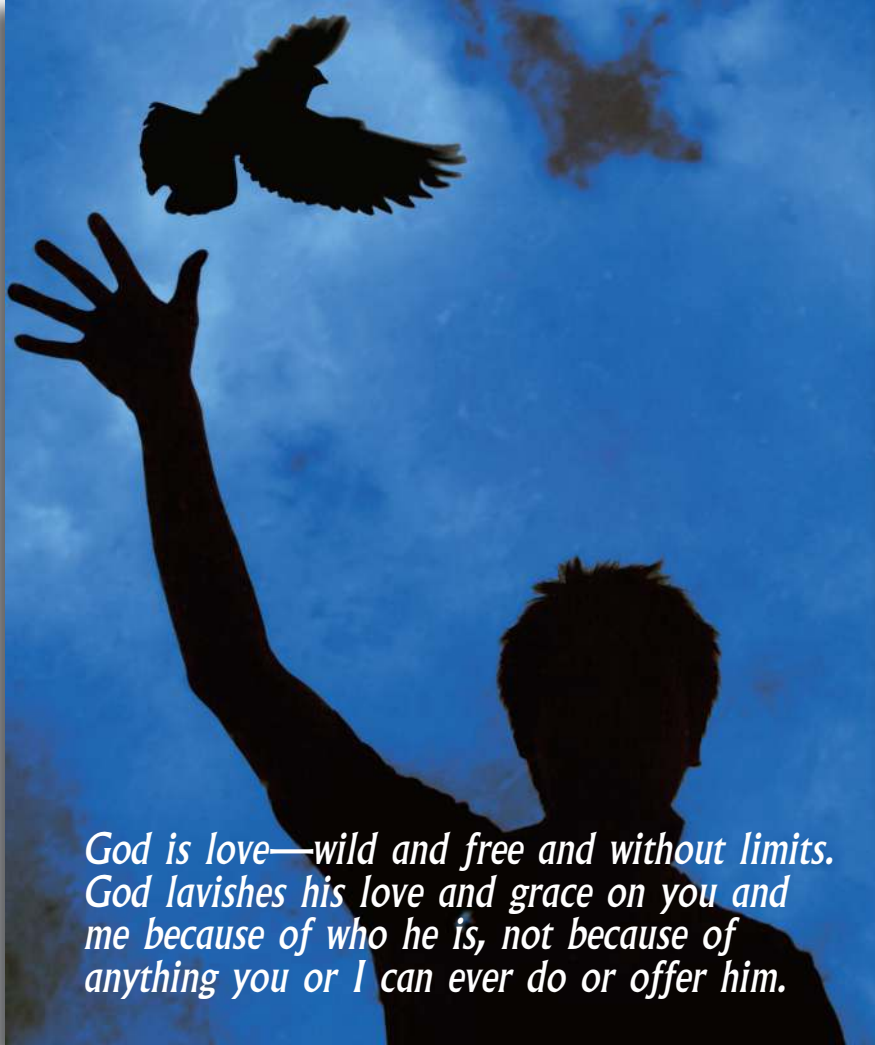
God doesn’t desire any material possession or any deed or work we can offer, but he does desire our trust and our love.

To help us understand the relationship he freely provides, apart from any “deal” we might offer, he reveals himself by his grace.

God is love—wild and free and without limits. God lavishes his love and grace on you and me because of who he is, not because of anything you and I can ever do or offer him.

We can’t “work” God. We can’t fool him or trick him with our wheeling and dealing negotiations. God cannot be manipulated—and we should be deeply thankful he cannot be, shouldn’t we?





God is love—wild and free and without limits. God lavishes his love and grace on you and me because of who he is, not because of anything you or I can ever do or offer him.

If you want a bargain, then you want Christ-less, performance-based religion.

Bargaining is what religion is all about. Religion is about making a bargain with God—you know the drill—we try to haggle and negotiate with God, and our prayer goes something like this:

“OK God, I will pray more, I will pay more, I will try harder, and I will do better. I will stop doing bad things.”

“Then, if and when I do, here’s your end of the deal God. If I do all this stuff for you, then I don’t expect to win the lottery, but in return for what I do for you, here’s the deal: you should make sure I don’t have any serious health problems, no tragic accidents to me or my family, no huge family dramas and no kids in trouble with the law.”

Christ-less religion teaches that the purpose of prayer is to change God’s mind and to get him to see it our way—to make a deal.

But one of the primary purposes of prayer is to change us. God doesn’t need to change.

God doesn’t do bargains. God doesn’t do religion!

Our relationship with God is all about God. Our relationship with God is offered to us on the basis of God’s goodness, not in any manner, shape or form on our goodness.

Our relationship with God is *faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone*. And that is such a deal! □

Healing

Words age. Just like people, as words get older, they also change. Just like some of us, word meanings begin to sag, develop new wrinkles and can lose touch with our rapidly shifting culture. Old definitions become tired and crusty in their twilight years. If we don’t pay attention, these aging words deteriorate.

Words, like people, that were once full of life, meaning and faith may atrophy and become crotchety and religious—best consigned to verbal retirement.

Biblical terms such as *sin*, *repentance* and *justification* have not aged well.

Religion imbued these storied terms with finger-wagging overtones until they became grumpy and legalistic. They wearied ears and hearts to the cringing point. It’s tempting to put them out to pasture for good.

This need not be. Like my many silver-haired friends, the ancient words used by Christ and his apostles contain libraries of beautiful wisdom. If we’re willing to listen and give them due care, we may even heal these weary words for fresh use.

“Sin”—Missing What Mark?

We’re often told “sin” refers to “missing the mark” but then left to assume the bullseye is moralistic perfection. Rather, the goal or *telos* of human design and destiny is none other than a love union with the Trinity, with each other and with our world.

To sin (every kind of sin) is to misuse our God-given freedom and energies for selfishness. Sin is turning away from self-giving, other-welcoming love.

Inevitably, our forays into self-centeredness are



Weary Words

By Brad Jersak

also self-destructive—a turn from love and life into a wasting disease that ultimately proves fatal apart from the help of a Great Physician.

How did Christ deal with the destructive effects of sin? One answer is that God-in-Christ reconciled us to himself by (1) *forgiving* our sin and (2) *healing* us of sin.

First, the Trinity of Love *forgave* or *pardoned* the guilt incurred by sin, expunging our record of

God “heals us of sin” with an empowering grace that frees us from slavery to self-will... This is the righteousness of love expressed in real life... In this one God-man, all humanity (including you and me) and all divinity (Father, Son and Spirit) are united in love.

wrongs. Sin that is forgiven need not be punished. Punishment is the opposite of forgiveness.

On the Cross, God in Christ forgave our sin and reconciled us to himself.

That was a “done deal”—the moment Christ prayed “Father, forgive them!” and proclaimed, “It is finished!”

Second, Christ *heals* us of the sickness of sin itself (not just guilt for sin). Sin is our selfish turn from love, defacing the image of God in

us and defiling our actions. But God “heals us of sin” with an empowering grace that frees us from slavery to self-will.

Christ frees us to surrender to love and to bear the fruit of his Spirit. This is the *righteousness* of love expressed in real life.

This understanding of “sin” rehabilitates other tired words such as “repentance,” “justification” and “reconciliation.”

- *Repentance* is not self-loathing. It is simply turning back to love in orientation and practice.

- *Justification* is not a legal verdict. It is the restored state of our love union with God.

- *Reconciliation* is not changing God’s resentful mind. It is the restoration of the love we had previously abandoned.

How Christ Accomplished This

This is why it is so vital that we proclaim Christ as God Incarnate—

one Person, both fully God and fully human.

As God, Christ directed his all-inclusive, expansive love toward rebellious humanity. Jesus showed us God’s love.

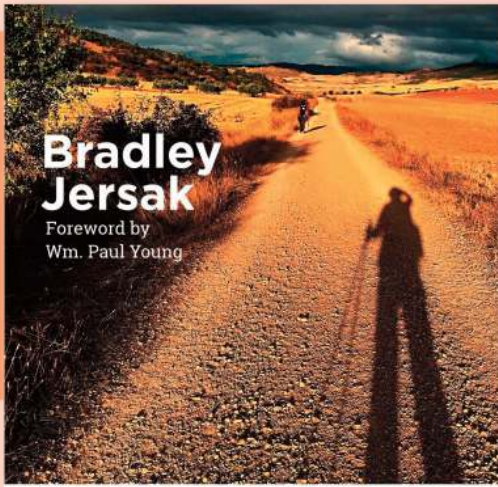
As the true human, Christ turned humanity back to the love of God in the vicarious, God-welcoming *metanoia* (change of mind and way of life) of surrender—from his baptism, through Gethsemane and ultimately on the Cross.

By turning and returning humanity toward divine Love, Christ reunited Creator and creation. He walked our prodigal hearts back into his Father’s house. He restores unselfish love in our deepest being and in our daily lives.

In this one God-man, all humanity (including you and me) and all divinity (Father, Son and Spirit) are united in love.

That’s good news for weary words and weary people—a beautiful gospel I’ll never tire of hearing or telling. □

Brad Jersak is the author of A More Christlike God and its forthcoming sequel, A More Christlike Way. See page 6 for more details.



**Bradley
Jersak**

Foreword by
Wm. Paul Young

A MORE CHRISTLIKE WAY

A More
Beautiful Faith

Coming Soon!

A MORE CHRISTLIKE WAY

A CWR Press sequel to
A More Christlike God

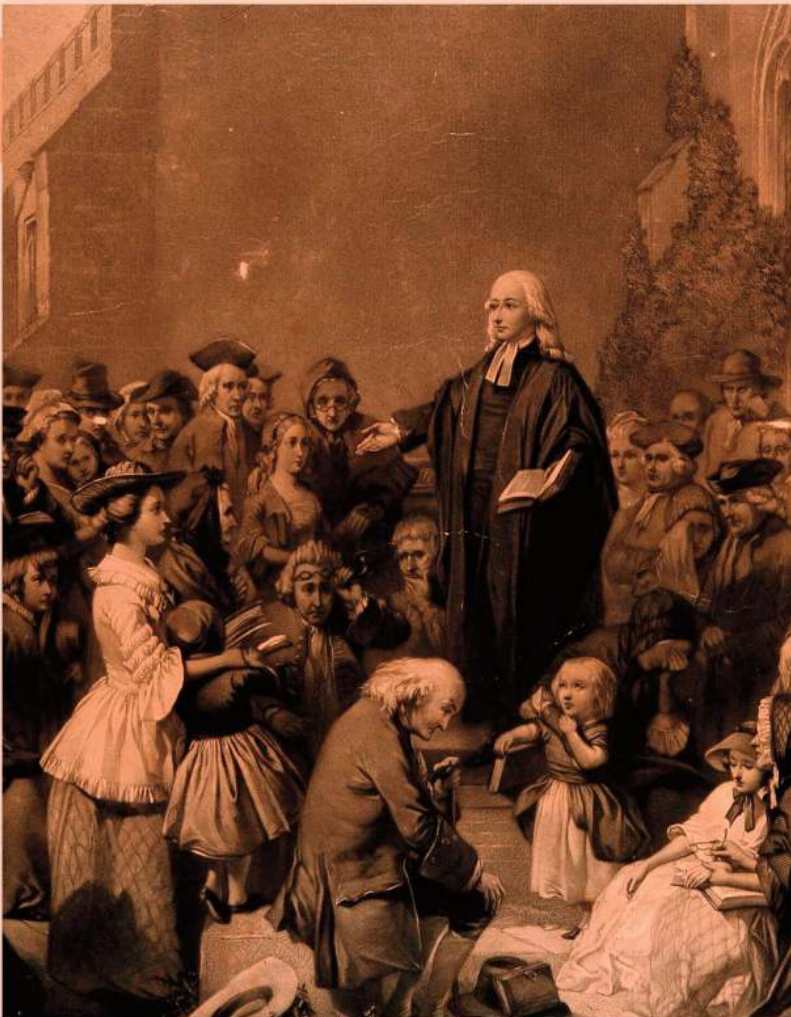
AUDIO VERSION OF *A MORE CHRISTLIKE GOD*
Now Available on Amazon & iTunes

Two of the questions Brad will ask in *AMCW* are addressed by John Wesley, the 18th century evangelist.

JOHN WESLEY — “On Faith”

Q: Can people turn to the Light of Christ and follow him without knowing his Name?

Wesley: “A divine conviction of God, and the things of God, as, even in its infant state, enables everyone that possesses it to fear God and work righteousness. Whosoever, in every nation, believes thus far, the Apostle [Peter] declares is accepted.”



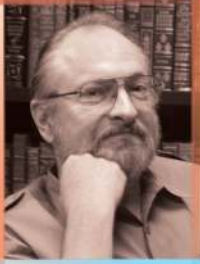
Q: If they can be accepted, what is the advantage of knowing the Name?

Wesley:

1. In knowing the Name we enjoy the full benefits of the redeemed life. In the name of Christ, we come to know the name of God [*Abba*], and can relate to God as our Father—not as servants but as his sons and daughters.
2. In knowing the Name, we enjoy the full assurance of our salvation on the basis of what Christ has done.



Engraving: After he was forbidden from preaching from the pulpits of parish churches, Wesley began open-air preaching in the streets and fields.



Reflections in Pools

My wife Kaye is always looking out for my health. She'd like to see me spending less time sitting on the living room couch. So she signed me up with a nearby senior fitness club, featuring an excellent 75-foot-long pool. Kaye does aqua-aerobics classes, and I'm there nearly every morning to swim laps, while classic rock from the Sixties echoes from the PA system.

A pool full of seniors presents unique challenges. Invariably, four or five people are bobbing across the water like WWII German naval mines in a British harbor. We lap swimmers must navigate around them, or signal our course to avoid collisions. If the timing is right, one of us can score the coveted single lane, cordoned off by floating safety rope.

At first I thought Ha! Most of these people aren't moving very fast. They're just here to float around and talk. I'm the only one here getting real exercise.

That was before I met the 90-year-old man who swims 20 laps a day without any breaks. That's 40 pool lengths—3,000 feet! A woman, I'm guessing a few years my senior, is often doing laps when I get there and still swimming when I leave. Some people prefer groups and classes. Others prefer to do their own thing, treading water or paddling around with noodles. Some who have had recent injuries, operations or heart conditions may be pushing the envelope just to get in the water, slowly building their strength back. Everyone in the pool has a different story.

This pool is in sharp contrast with one where I had a lot of fun in the mid-1960s. On an island in the Columbia River near Portland, Oregon, the 123-acre Jantzen Beach Amusement Park boasted multiple pools that could accommodate 2,000 swimmers a day—many of them young people celebrating their physical attributes. A platform atop a 25-foot diving tower was always packed with teenage guys daring each other to jump. Of course I took the leap—a cannonball—because I had to prove something. My sinuses drained for two days.

Fifty-five years later, here in the senior pool, these kinds of activities are not happening. People are performing what is necessary to keep their hearts pumping and their joints functional. The only competition, if any, is with one's self.

Seems crazy to combine the two kinds of pools—but isn't that the reality for the Great Spiritual Pool in which we're all swimming? At one end are the people who have something to prove, and that's okay. There's a lot of fun, hollering and raucous activity down there. But as we make our way toward the other end, things change. I'm not saying septuagenarians can't be ambitious, overly competitive, or even tyrannical (business, politics and religion prove otherwise). It's just that, from my standpoint, most of us on this end have begun to calm down a little. We don't mind floating. To paraphrase Harvard developmental psychologist Robert Kegan, authentic relationships are more realizable in later years, after such things as competition, posturing and institutionalism have been laid aside.

What about lifeguards? At Jantzen Beach, lifeguards were everywhere, mostly putting a lid on running, rowdiness and risky behavior. In my senior pool, that's just not necessary. Cameras watch for the rare emergency.

At the Great Spiritual Pool, there is definitely a Lifeguard, but he's often stealthier than we would like. Many swimmers don't even realize he's there. He doesn't always rescue us from our foolhardiness, and the reality is that none of us get out of the pool alive (the folks at the senior end of the pool are coming to grips with that fact). But when his friends in the pool reach out to help others and express his love, that's when the Lifeguard becomes seen.

He is, after all, our Eternal Lifeguard, and he knows that the end of our time in this pool is the beginning of eternity in another. Imagine the fun! As one old fellow unpretentiously commented to me in the pool this morning, "The water feels good, doesn't it?" □

—Monte Wolverton



Quotes & Connections



“The Cross is a picture of the Christlike God, a portrait of love, and a symbol of consent. Exactly what do I mean by ‘consent’? The Cross is the perfection of consent because Christ rules through love rather than coercion—through persuasion rather than force—through revelation rather than domination. Thus, God’s consent is far greater than merely ‘allowing,’ as if he just sits back and watches the tragedies of life, uninvolved and passive. No! God’s consent is a great ‘in-between’ initiative. He opens his arms wide in welcome. He acts decisively in love.”—Brad Jersak (*A More Christlike God*, page 122).

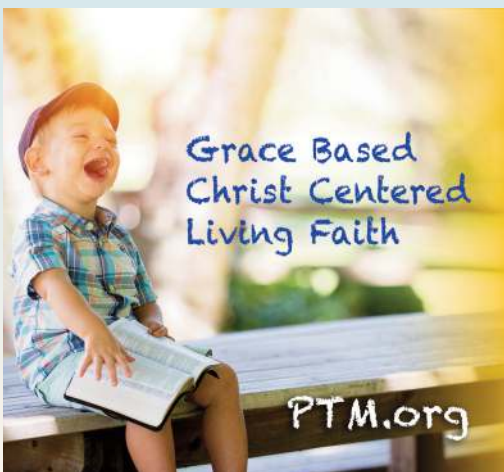
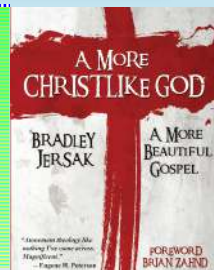
“Free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having.”
—C.S. Lewis

“God’s grace is not just an addition to our life. It is a contradiction to our life.”—Timothy Keller

The Lord Jesus is not calling me to self-condemnation and unhealthy guilt. Self-centered guilt closes me in on myself and preempts the presence of a compassionate God. I should not be shocked and horrified that I have failed. Jesus certainly isn’t. In his boundless mercy that keeps no score of wrongs, he calls me to repentance, to humbly acknowledge my failure without being unduly disturbed by it, and the power of His Spirit to get on with the compassionate life.”
—Brennan Manning

A More Christlike God— A More Beautiful Gospel

Audio version available on Amazon.com



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

with GREG ALBRECHT
& BRAD JERSAK

MISSION STATEMENT

Plain Truth Ministries proclaims Christianity without the religion. We express our Christ-centered ministry as *faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone.*

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

For an electronic subscription go to www.ptm.org/sub. The Internet allows us to serve readers around the world. Archives of *Plain Truth* are available at www.ptm.org. Printed copies of *Plain Truth* are a benefit mailed to generous, regular PTM Friends and Partners. If you would like to contribute go to www.ptm.org/give.

TO UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS

Be sure to notify us immediately of any change in your address by calling us at 1-800-309-4466, visiting our website at www.ptm.org/contact or writing to *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

TO SEND A LETTER OR E-MAIL

Write to *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129, or email us at managing.editor@ptm.org.

The editors reserve the right to print or not print comments so addressed, in whole or in part, as deemed in the public interest, and to print your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We will protect the confidentiality of correspondence that we deem to be of a personal nature. Correspondence published by Plain Truth Ministries does not necessarily reflect the opinions of Plain Truth Ministries.

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Greg Albrecht
EDITOR/ART DIRECTOR: Laura Urista
EDITOR: Brad Jersak
PUBLISHING AND CIRCULATION DIRECTOR:
Dennis Warkentin
ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Monte Wolverton

COPYRIGHT & POSTAL INFO

The Plain Truth is published six times a year by Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129. Copyright © 2019 Plain Truth Ministries. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Volume 84, Number 4: July 2019. Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers. *The Plain Truth*® is a U.S. trademark. “Let’s Make a Deal” is a registered trademark. Cover courtesy CBS Studios.

SUBMISSIONS

The Plain Truth does not publish unsolicited manuscripts. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited artwork, photographs or manuscripts.

PLAIN TRUTH MINISTRIES

The Plain Truth is published by Plain Truth Ministries (PTM). If you are interested in learning more about PTM, visit our website at www.ptm.org (and email us) or write us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Plain Truth Ministries gratefully accepts contributions (tax deductible in the U.S.) to further the ongoing work of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. We accept donations in U.S. funds by check, money order or credit card. Please call us at 1-800-309-4466, visit our secure website, www.ptm.org/give, or write to us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129.