

UNLEASHING GOD'S TRUTH, ONE VERSE AT A TIME

DYNAMIC RESOURCES



5 BOOKS YOU REALLY
NEED TO READ



Emmie Fischbacher Williams

THE CHARACTER
CRISIS



John MacArthur

THE PASTOR'S
JOB DESCRIPTION

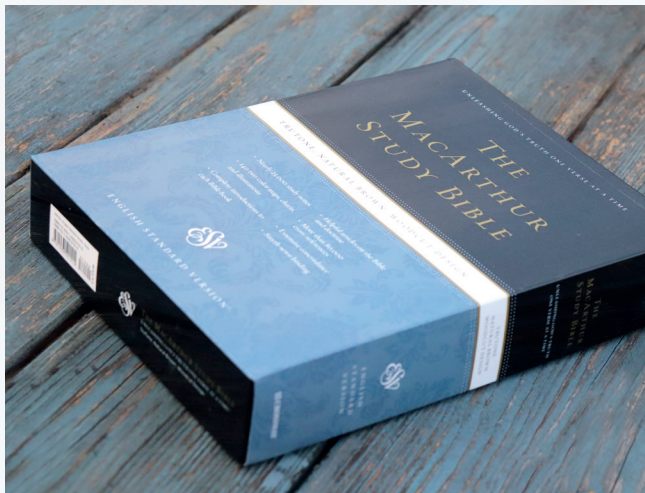


Cameron Buettel
and Jeremiah Johnson

WHY CHRIST
MUST RETURN



John MacArthur

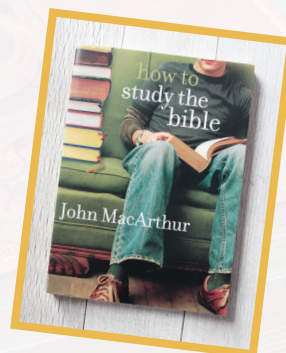


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"Why is Grace to You doing more now than we've ever done before?"

MINISTRY UPDATE FROM GTY EUROPE DIRECTOR, D PAUL MITCHELL

"Why is Grace to You doing more now than we've ever done before?"

In a 50th anniversary radio interview, GTY Executive Director, Phil Johnson, put the above question to John MacArthur. This is John's reply:

"Well, I think there are a number of factors. First of all because we teach the Word of God, and I believe that true Christians across this country, and around the world, hunger for the Word of God. I think there is a genuine spiritual hunger for knowing God in the heart

of a believer. I'm convinced that when you know the Lord you love Him, and when you love Him, you want to know Him more. And so there is a driving desire, there's a hunger for righteousness, and that means a hunger for the truth that produces righteousness in the power of the Holy Spirit. So I think it's that.

And I think secondly, it's trust. Fifty years of doing this, people have begun to take a look at our teaching through the years and they have said, "You know, this seems consistent, this seems trustworthy, this seems accurate." I think we've got a growing number of



PREACHING AT A CAMP FOR REFUGEES



OPEN-AIR BIBLE STUDY

Bereans who are searching the scriptures to see if the things that we are saying on Grace to You through these decades are so. So I think there has been a growing trust. It's the teaching of the Word of God for which people hunger and it's the ministry of Grace to You over half a century, faithfully teaching the Word of God in such a way that people are fed and they spread that feeding.

And the third thing, and maybe the most important thing of all; there is a famine in the world for the teaching of the Word of God. There is a prophecy in

the Old Testament about a famine of the hearing of the Word of God. I think that's a reality in our day. There are lots of churches, there are lots of so-called Christian ministries – but there is a famine in hearing the Word of God accurately and faithfully proclaimed. That's what Grace to You does. So I think there are fewer and fewer places where people can go and actually get the Word of God. When we say we unleash one verse at a time we mean exactly that – and that's the way God wrote the Bible, and that's the way I think it is to be received. So, I think it's just our legacy, our commitment, the power of the Word of God and then in the end it's the power of the Holy Spirit."

Because, as John says above, there is a famine in the world (and especially in Europe) for the Word of God, we are increasingly doing more at GTY Europe than we have ever done before to address this very serious problem.

As Director, I regularly receive "Macedonian Calls" from church leaders all over Europe asking for help to organise conferences and training seminars for pastors and church leaders, Bible teaching conferences for



COUNSELLING AND PRAYER

church members, and consultations on evangelism. Obviously, one man alone can't respond to all of this, so I'm very grateful for my colleagues at GTY in the U.S and graduates from The Master's Seminary who ministered alongside me on most of my trips during the past year.

A particular focus for our ministry in recent months has been amongst the huge number of African refugees on the island of Sicily, and in this we have been able to partner with the German-based mission organisation, Voice of Hope. The mission has a small centre in Palermo with a full-time missionary, Brother Daniel, who is not only responsible for pastoring the local congregation, but is also attempting to visit as many of the 240 refugee camps on the island as he can, in order to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to establish Bible teaching classes using the **Fundamentals of the Faith** resources we supply.

I spent a week with Brother Daniel earlier this year and during that time we were joined by two other brothers from Romania, Ilie Bledea and Dani Scurt. Both of these faithful pastors are well-known to me as they arrange my ministry schedule when I'm in Romania and they were keen to experience cross-cultural ministry, something which is not so common in Romania.

We visited a range of camps during the week; some accommodated several thousand people, whilst others were much smaller, with perhaps a dozen or so residents. The largest camp we visited houses 5,000 refugees and the Italian Army is in charge of security. The camp is not a prison and refugees are free to come and go, but we were not allowed inside the perimeter fence, so instead we invited the people to join us in the car park adjacent to the guardhouse for an evangelistic preaching service. For me it was a unique and unforgettable experience to preach in the open-air (without amplification) to a very large and attentive crowd of Africans, whilst constantly being under the watchful gaze of Italian soldiers carrying automatic weapons.

Several significant book translation projects have also been completed within the last few months, including the publication of **Strange Fire** into Russian. Phil



FREE DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY BIBLES

Johnson and Justin Peters were the keynote speakers at a conference in Kiev to launch the book and the first print run sold out almost immediately. The potential reach for this book is massive and we trust the Lord will use it to draw believers out of the error and false teaching that characterises many churches in Russian speaking Europe.

At a time of great uncertainty and unsettling change in both the U.K and Europe, I'd like to thank you for your faithful support of GTY and for trusting us with your monetary gifts, which together with your prayers, are enabling us to respond positively to the many challenges that the church of Jesus Christ faces. No doubt the greatest challenge we at GTY must continue to address with your help is that of providing the healthy, life-giving spiritual food so desperately needed by those dying from spiritual starvation – which inevitably happens when there is a famine of the accurately and faithfully proclaimed, Holy Spirit anointed, verse by verse teaching of the Word of God.

5 Books You Really Need to Read

*Reviewed and Recommended
by Emmie Fischbacher Williams*

Since completing his first best-selling book, *The Gospel According to Jesus* in 1988, John MacArthur has written nearly 400 books and study guides including, *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, *Strange Fire*, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, *A Tale of Two Sons*, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, *The Truth War*, *Slave*, *One Perfect Life*, and *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* series. MacArthur's titles have been translated into more than two dozen languages and the MacArthur Study Bible is available in English, Spanish, Russian, German, French, Portuguese, Italian, Arabic and Chinese.

Perhaps the reason that many of MacArthur's books have been so well received, and are often perceived as "controversial", is because he has chosen to tackle unpopular topics. Topics that many Christians are content either to know little about or openly prefer not to deal with because they're either uncomfortable or don't wish to offend anyone. Let's take a look at 5 of MacArthur's most "controversial" and popular books from over the years and we will quickly see why, by the grace of God, they have made such an impact on the Christian world.

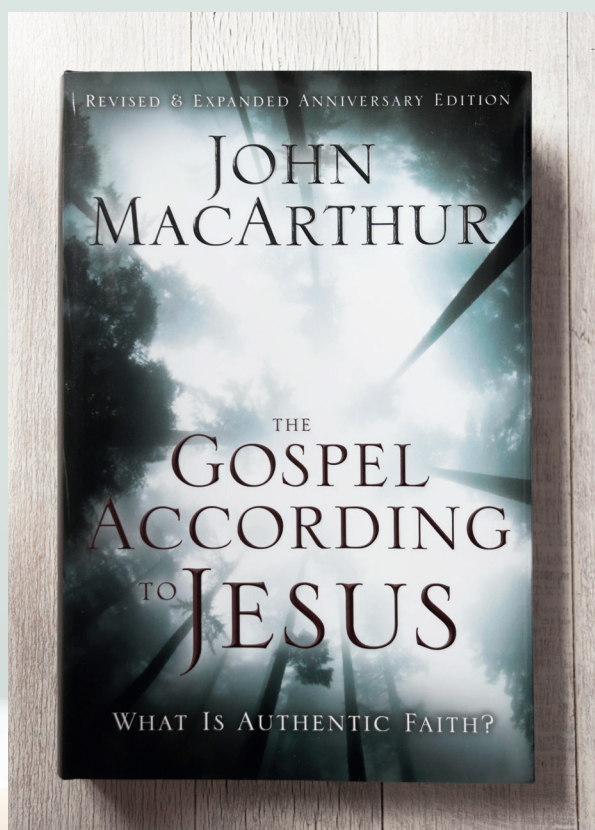
1. The Gospel According to Jesus

The Gospel According to Jesus is a truly courageous, scripture saturated presentation of the Gospel. The book drew both wide acclaim and controversy when it was published in 1988, confronting the "easy believe-ism" that has swept through many parts of Evangelical Christianity. While defending the truth of Christ's Lordship, MacArthur shows us that, as the author of our faith, Jesus is our ultimate and most perfect example, not only as teacher but as the living, walking, breathing Gospel.

The driving force behind this book is MacArthur's concern for those who are wrongly comforted with the thought that salvation is all about their decision, their hand up in acceptance, and their choice for Christ. Scripture leaves us in no doubt that belief alone in the facts of the Gospel is not enough to save someone. "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" (James 2:19). Scripture makes it clear it is not merely faith in the offer and faith in the words on the page, but faith in the One who was lifted up on the cross to die. True,

saving faith is not only granting of eternal life, but liberation from sin.

MacArthur rightly says that, “The belief that someone could be a true Christian while that person’s whole lifestyle, value, system, speech, and attitude are marked by a stubborn refusal to surrender to Christ as Lord is a notion that shouldn’t even need to be refuted.” Sadly, such a book was desperately needed as many of those who profess to be Christians continue to live without Christ and therefore without an authentic hope of Heaven.



One of the founders of modern dispensationalism, Lewis Sperry Chafer has said, “The New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation”. In addition to this, the Ryrie Study Bible claims repentance is a “false addition to faith” when made a condition of salvation. In response to these false claims, MacArthur discusses at length numerous individuals who upon coming into contact with Jesus unequivocally acknowledged their sin prior to responding to Jesus’ call to repentance and faith. For example, when Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4, His number one concern was with her sin; and His number one concern with us is the same. Scripture makes it clear that Christ can do nothing for those who can’t and won’t

acknowledge their sin. If our response to the message of Jesus is anything other than “Woe is me, for I am ruined” (Isaiah 6:5) then our hearts are not prepared to receive Christ at all.

In the book, MacArthur gives much discussion to what has been termed in some circles as the Lordship Salvation debate, which questions whether it is ‘necessary’ to submit to Christ as Lord when trusting in Christ as Saviour. An early discussion about the Lordship salvation debate appeared in the 1948 systematic theology of Lewis Sperry Chafer, mentioned earlier, but the controversy moved to the forefront of the evangelical world in the late 1980s after the publication of **The Gospel According to Jesus**. But in fact, there is no debate. We do not “make” Christ Lord, He is Lord. The Bible tells us that even creation’s voice shouts forth of Christ’s Lordship, it is unmistakable. Not just His power and ability as Creator, but as God over us all. MacArthur tells us simply, “There is no salvation except ‘lordship’ salvation”.

It has also been said that “it is possible, but miserable, to be saved without ever making Christ Lord of your life”, but is repentance without submission possible? In fact, you cannot have the one without the other. This false philosophy shows us how far some have strayed away from biblical teaching and the very idea that any misery could accompany salvation should show us that Jesus could have no part in it. MacArthur summarises this beautifully: “Salvation is a supernatural, divine transformation — no less than a miracle that takes place in the soul. It is a true work of God, and it must make a difference in the life of the one whose eyes have been opened.” “If salvation is truly a work of God . . . it cannot leave his desires unchanged or his conduct unaltered”.

For the truly born-again Christian there is a natural and deep desire to worship and follow Christ as Lord when He comes to dwell within us. This desire bursts forth uncontrollably. It is not only an inevitable response to conversion, but an irresistible one. In the same way that we are slaves to sin before we are saved, we become slaves to our Saviour, Jesus. Not just outwardly in our actions, but in our hearts.

Jesus is irresistible to the truly converted Christian; His word is not foolishness but a delight. The Christian

life is only burdensome and impossibly heavy if we have no true rest for our souls. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” (1 John 5:3)

It would be misleading to say that MacArthur uses this book merely to challenge Christians to re-evaluate their commitment to Christ by examining the spiritual fruits of their lives. As important as that self-examination is for every believer, his primary concern is for the thousands of people who will, at the last day, say “Lord, Lord.” and the Lord will say, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (See Matthew 7:23). MacArthur rightly warns the reader that, “those who refuse Him as Lord cannot use Him as Saviour”.

Ultimately, **The Gospel According to Jesus** charges Christians to stand firm and preach the gospel as Jesus did. If we do not, we do so at the peril of countless souls, fooled into following a weak, non-sufficient, non-life-altering, hell bound ‘gospel’. The easy believe-ism that is so popular today makes Jesus a weak, far off and distant figure that has nothing to do with us - this is most definitely not the Jesus of the Bible.

We must stand for the truth that Jesus’ grace is altogether sufficient and cannot result in a Christian life that is barren and fruitless. (See John 15:8)

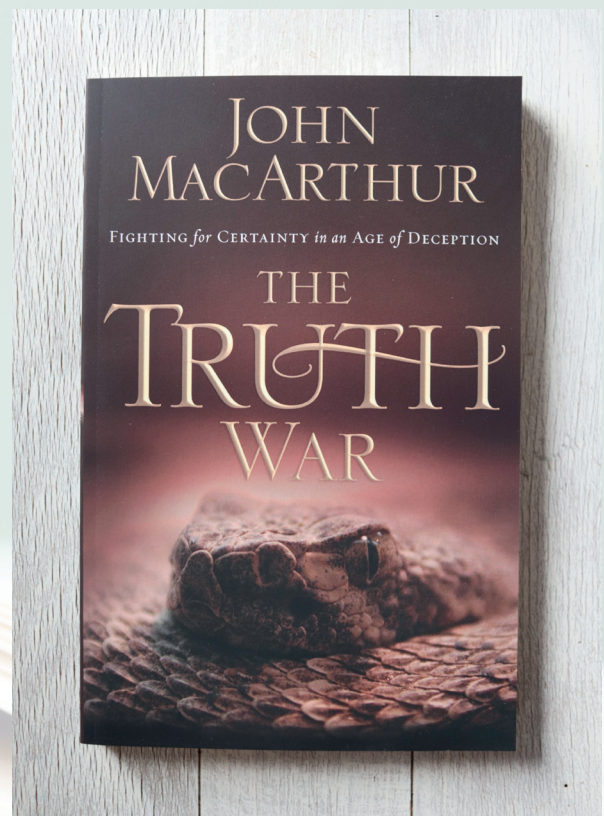
2. The Truth War

The Truth War is a ‘call to arms’ and examines the epistle of Jude in which God’s people are challenged to “contend earnestly for the faith”. Published in 2007, the book specifically deals with the importance of absolute Biblical truth which is under attack, especially from the Emerging Church and postmodern thinking.

So, what is truth? Is it a subjective notion? MacArthur gives us a simple definition that encapsulates everything the Bible tells us, “Truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God. Even more to the point: truth is the self-expression of God.” Without God, there is no truth. He is the author of truth. The Bible leaves no ambiguity. Christ overflows with truth and the corruption of that

truth which is revealed to us in God’s word can only, in turn, breed corruption.

Perhaps to our surprise, the Bible teaches (See 2 Peter 2:1) us that false teachers come from within the church. It’s professing Christians, not outsiders, who bring in new opinions subtly and so called ‘new ways’ of looking at things. But how do we recognise false teachers? They dress up an old lie in new clothes. What did Satan say to Eve in the garden? “Did God really say that?” The clothes may have changed, but it’s the same old satanic lie.



False teachers are very popular, they make sin look attractive. They appear empowered; they have a special “anointing”. Many of these false teachers brazenly claim direct revelation from God in order to shut down criticism and to justify their own sin and ostentatious lifestyles. Ultimately, false teachers destroy themselves and all who follow them.

In the last 150 years or so there has been an increasing shift away from God and the Bible with the result that in a great many churches the Bible is ignored and truth has lost all meaning. Uncertainty has become the new truth. Doubt and scepticism have been canonised as a form of humility. Right and wrong have been redefined in terms of subjective feelings and personal perspectives.”

The emerging church movement derives its name from

the idea that, as culture changes, the church should change with it. They want to revamp the church and remodel the way we think about truth itself. As a product of post-modernism, the emerging church embraces a growing distaste and dissolution of "cold, hard fact" in favour of "warm, fuzzy subjectivity." Experience over reason, subjectivity over objectivity, spirituality over true religion, feelings over truth; these responses to modernism are now considered necessary to successfully engage contemporary culture in Evangelical circles. Naturally, the emerging church rejects any standard methodology for doing anything. Whilst some groups go only a little way with this way of thinking, and attempt to remain biblically sound, most embrace full blown post-modernist thinking, which inevitably leads to a very liberal, loose interpretation of the Bible. We might like to toy with a life of vague spirituality but the Bible tells us that only leads to death. Truth is built into us as God's creation. We cannot get away from it. Did Jesus quibble over the truth for fear of offending His listeners? Did He ever adapt His truth to make it more palatable to the modern thinkers of His day? No! Never!

MacArthur reminds us, "Battles over the truth were raging inside the Christian community even in apostolic times, when the church was just beginning. In fact, the record of scripture indicates that false teachers in the church immediately became a significant problem wherever the gospel went."

What does Jude really mean when he appeals to believers to "contend for the faith"? Quoting Charles Spurgeon, MacArthur shows us "the spotless purity of truth must always be at war with the blackness of heresy and lies." Jude tells us we must be soldiers in the truth war. We are told the task is intimidating and the enemy is fearsome, but believers can never be casualties in the truth war, only victorious through Christ Jesus.

The real antidote to false teaching is to love the Lord Jesus Christ, "our God and Saviour" above anything else. Love Him, delight in Him, and make Him your all in all. Do not prepare the soil of your soul for false teaching by indiscriminately listening to and believing each and every preacher and teacher who broadcasts on Christian radio and TV. Beware of following any individual without checking that what they say actually accords with scripture (See Acts 17:11).

3. *Strange Fire*

With more than half a billion members worldwide, the Charismatic movement is the fastest growing religious movement in the world. In addition, nearly half the American Christians in any denomination now embrace the basic premise of the prosperity gospel: God wants you to be happy, healthy and rich.



Strange Fire gives a thorough evaluation of the doctrines and practices of the modern charismatic movement and clearly describes the true ministry of the Holy Spirit. Published in 2013, MacArthur exposes the irony that a movement supposedly devoted to honouring and emphasising the ministry of the Holy Spirit actually treats Him with much casual contempt and condescension. Bizarre practices and exaggerated claims falsely make Him look like a farce and a fraud. The possibilities for global reach through religious television and charismatic mass media seem endless and MacArthur warns, "When these imposters give the world the false and damaging view of true evangelicalism the name of God is tarnished and the Spirit of God is dishonoured."

Strange Fire encourages a deep concern for the 'danger of offending the Holy Spirit with counterfeit

worship'. Speaking gibberish, falling backwards to the floor, laughing uncontrollably, and writhing on the ground is all done on a regular basis in the name of the Holy Spirit. MacArthur observes, "...as if He were the author of confusion and the architect of disorder." So many Charismatic services are characterised by these unbiblical practices and are full of mindless, emotional hysteria.

From worldwide sales of bottled 'miracle water' to the option to pay a monthly fee to be an 'apostle', there seem to be no limits to the outrageous claims of the Charismatic and prosperity gospel ministry. As always, it is not only the most outrageous and violent falsehoods against which we should be on guard, but those that, as Jude says, have 'crept in unnoticed' (Jude 4). MacArthur holds them up to the ultimate litmus test - the scriptures, which expose the perils of both.

As the book progresses, a common theme emerges; that of having 'enough' faith. So called 'healing crusade' leaders blame countless failures on a 'lack of faith' in those who don't experience healing, cleverly deflecting any blame from themselves and continuing to manipulate the suffering, emotionally. This manipulation only appears to elevate further the leader who supposedly has "unique access to God". Some of the most popular of these leaders or so called 'healers' are estimated to bring in nearly 100 million dollars annually and live in luxurious extravagance beyond belief, a fact that should cause anyone, anywhere to question what's really going on.

In comparison to the exaggerated and false claims of today's "healers", countless individuals in the Bible were healed without ever expressing or showing signs of believing faith. Jesus never healed anyone for material gain, but helped those who had nothing to give in return, the lowest in society. At that time, physical healing served as a sign to authenticate the gospel message preached by Christ and the apostles. Most importantly, Jesus always pointed to their spiritual need of a saviour. God's ultimate plan was not to heal us physically but spiritually, through the sacrifice of His Son. A critical point here, MacArthur says, is that Jesus' healings never failed, unlike those we hear of today. This over - emphasis on emotional feelings and wild expectations causes people to lose sight of Jesus Christ and His word rather than draw

closer to Him through increasing faith and trust in His word.

Continually pointing us to scripture, MacArthur deals with the question: What should true Biblical worship look like? It's important to make the point that emotions are a good and a God given reality when in line with scripture. MacArthur says, "Authentic worship requires both spirit and truth" and should always correlate to understanding. Minds should be fully engaged. Encouragement and a willingness to bypass the mind in worship is truly dangerous and only leaves people vulnerable to be taken advantage of.

MacArthur points us to God's word and shows us that the claims of prominent leaders having a special, individual anointing from the Holy Spirit, is utterly false. The Bible makes it clear that anointing, for us today, is the promise of illumination from the Holy Spirit to understand the words of the Bible, when we come to faith in Jesus, which, if we are truly saved, we ALL have. We possess not only the words but also the teacher, the very author of the words; as He comes to dwell within us. The reality of being 'spirit-filled', a term so often used in Charismatic circles, is actually to be simply Christ-centred. Perhaps even more dangerous still, are the moderate prosperity preachers who will tell you "God is here to make YOUR dreams come true" and "God loves you just the way you are". They literally sell a false gospel. MacArthur terms this type of teaching "a variety of moralistic, therapeutic deism".

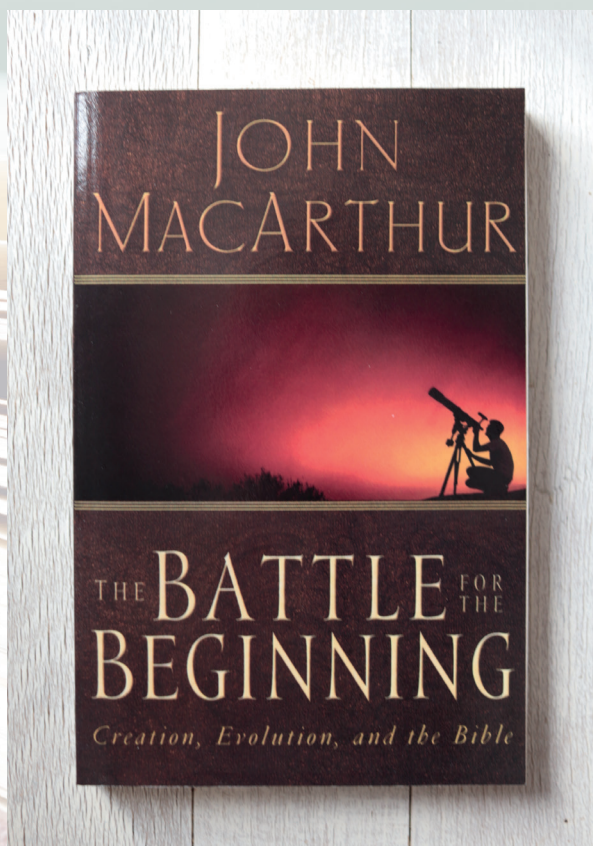
In **Strange Fire** we learn that Charismatic and prosperity leaders claim that whatever money is given 'in faith', God will multiply back to the giver, tenfold, even a hundred fold. In fact, it becomes increasingly difficult not to compare the modern day prosperity gospel to the medieval Roman Catholic sale of indulgences, except now there's a band and a good looking guy dressed up in a suit with a smile telling you how great you are! The Devil's lie always appeals to mankind's favourite obsession - himself. This marketing technique is a guaranteed winner, appealing only to the flesh and our worldly desires.

However, the Bible tells us a different story. Whether we will be rich or successful in this life is unknown to us but scripture repeatedly warns us not to set our hearts on the things of this world and its pleasures.

Instead, God wants us to obey Him, follow in His steps, honour Him and trust Him for everything through trials or victory for, ultimately, this is the reason we were created (See Ecclesiastes 12:13).

4. The Battle for the Beginning

Numerous Christians today would consider it unloving, divisive and completely unnecessary to 'battle' over the subject of origins. After all, many evangelicals today believe that evolution is a "fact", and so prefer to think of Genesis as poetic symbolism, while others would like to have their feet in both camps, wholly embracing evolution whilst remaining a Bible believer on all other fronts. But is this really a non-issue matter on which Christians shouldn't expend any time or energy, as some would contend? John MacArthur urges us to see that, "Everything in Scripture that teaches about sin and redemption assumes the literal truth of the first three chapters of Genesis. If we wobble to any degree on the truth of this passage," he insists, "we undermine the very foundations of our faith." These are radical words when one considers that much of the Evangelical Christian community



today believes that God created new forms of life gradually over a period of hundreds of millions of years and adjusts the interpretation of scripture to accommodate an old earth theory. MacArthur's book examines the ultimate consequences if God's word is removed, changed, or altered to fit man's religion and culture. This leads all the way to Jesus and ultimately has catastrophic ramifications.

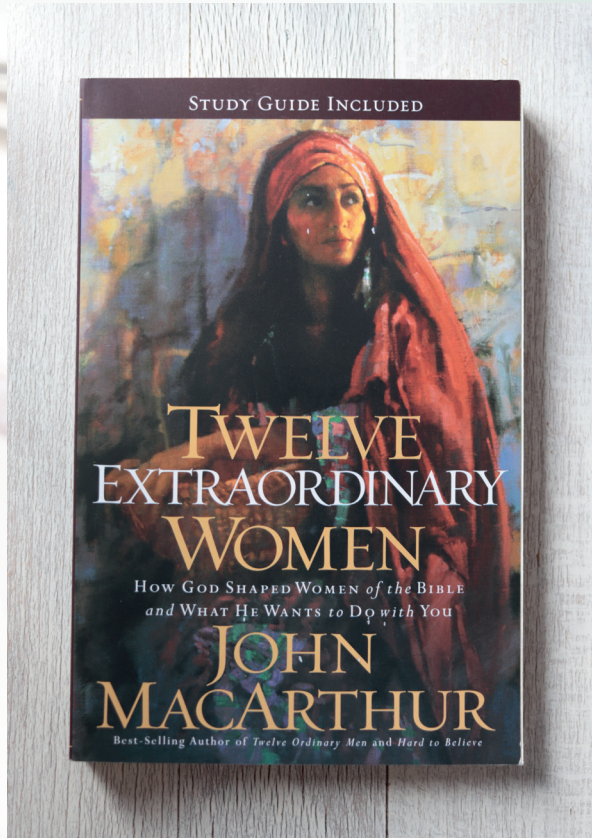
"Thanks to the theory of evolution," writes MacArthur, "naturalism is now the dominant religion of modern society..." Chance has been elevated to the role of creator, but in reality 'determines' nothing. "And such a view of chance is the polar opposite of reason. Common-sense logic suggests that every watch has a watch maker. Every building has a builder. Every structure has an architect. Every arrangement has a plan. Every plan has a designer. And every design has a purpose." The idea that 'given enough time' anything is possible and that everything has come out of nothing is the problem at the root of every naturalist's standpoint. Every question brings only irrationality.

It appears that many Christians today are embarrassed by a literal 6 day creation account and fear derision by their 'science minded' friends and so, have not taken the time to investigate for themselves in order to see that evolution offers only acceptance with the world and nothing else. Our understanding of science should never govern whether we take God's word literally or not. Huge numbers have been affected over the centuries by the ever evolving theories of the day, but God's word does not change with the winds of time. MacArthur strongly urges readers not to jump blindly on the bandwagon of those who shut their eyes to the truth because it doesn't fit with their belief system.

In **The Battle for the Beginning**, MacArthur proves to be anything but the world's idea of a closed-minded creationist; ignoring the facts, surviving on blind, unquestioning faith. Instead, he unashamedly places God's word as the highest authority. He uses logical reasoning and gives a broad scientific analysis of what the evidence shows us. God promises just what we see – infinite proof that His word is trustworthy. Ultimately, the book poses the question: What would prompt anyone to embrace such a system? The hard truth is that it is the world's sheer love of sin. People want to be comfortable in their sin and the only way to do that is to eliminate God.

5. Twelve Extraordinary Women

After the success of **Twelve Ordinary Men**, MacArthur chose to make the shift in the title for his next instalment. Published in 2005, **Twelve Extraordinary Women** takes a closer look at a selection of women in the Bible that were critical to the story of redemption. **Eve, Sarah, Rahab, Ruth, Hannah, Mary, Anna, the Samaritan woman, Martha and Mary, Mary Magdalene and Lydia** are all celebrated for their courage, hospitality, spiritual giftedness and great faith. They were at the very heart of God's redemptive work in history and serve as a great encouragement to believers today. Many of them experienced struggles, temptations and made terrible mistakes just like us, yet God used them in wonderful ways. What truly made them extraordinary was their life changing encounters with God, "through no glory of their own, but through the work of an extraordinary saviour."



A look into the lives of some of these extraordinary women gives us an insight into one of the unique

features of the Bible in the way it exalts women, when the culture of the day would have been very much the opposite. In Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman and the New Testament church is likewise represented as a woman; the Bride of Christ. God's command to honour both father and mother would have been a revolutionary concept when most pagan cultures were dominated by men ruling with an iron fist. This is especially important when the Bible is so often portrayed as demeaning towards women and out of touch with modern equality. In the social and religious life of Israel and the New Testament church, women were never relegated to the background. MacArthur tells us, "They took part in all the feasts and public worship of Israel and were not required to be veiled or silent in the public square, as they are in some Middle Eastern cultures even today."

The book is rich with detail and gives a greater sense of context and significance to women's roles within scripture. MacArthur reminds us, "It is true that most Rabbis in that culture did not normally allow women to be their disciples. But Christ encouraged men and women alike to take His yoke and learn from Him. This is yet another evidence of how women are honoured in scripture."

A closer look into the lives of these twelve women also gives us a deeper understanding of what God prizes most in women and what we should aim to cultivate in our own lives. Aside from the great faith that all these women exhibited throughout their lives, they were all zealous for their God. Both Anna and the Samaritan woman immediately spoke to others about Christ. "Many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him, because of the word of the woman who testified." (John 4:39)

One of the most noticeable qualities of these women is that they were all eagerly looking to the coming of the Redeemer that had been promised. Anna hid God's word closely in her heart her whole life while she waited for the promised Messiah. She endured a hard life but dedicated herself entirely to God. MacArthur remarks, "These were godly women who devoted their whole lives to spiritual things." It is no coincidence that God chose these women. It should help us to take courage and never to allow our lives to be ruled by our failings and disappointments before God. These women are extraordinary only because they received extraordinary grace. They stand as reminders of our potential – they all point to

Christ. Your life too can be extraordinary, by His grace, remembering that faith always trusts, always hopes, and always obeys. Faith does not complain. Set your heart on things above, looking forward to heaven where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, and desire to be with Him (See Colossians 3:1-4).

Conclusion

The recurring theme that runs through all of these 5 books is the subject of truth. MacArthur's continued focus and reliance on the truth of God's word throughout each book is unmistakable. Each book exposes a significant problem within the Christian church today. Perhaps it is a problem which has subtly crept in over the years or one which people just prefer to brush under the carpet. No matter what it is, MacArthur's answer to the problem is always the same – God's word. Each book we have reviewed is so deeply rooted in scripture you could be in no doubt of MacArthur's alliances. No compromise is made and God's word is given the pre-eminence at every point.

Opening up the scripture on the subject of false teachers and the consequences of perverting the truth shows us that, what is wrong with the church now is what has always been wrong with the church. Everything God warns us about in His word has come to fruition. The pitfalls He warns us to avoid only ever lead to corruption and disillusionment of truth when we choose to go our own way and rebel against God.

While Jude and his charge to believers to 'contend earnestly for the faith' is primarily the subject of the Truth War, its charge and theme is echoed through all of these books. Much like Jude and the other apostles, MacArthur doesn't mince his words. He encourages a great sense of urgency and makes no attempt to sugar-coat any issue to make people feel more comfortable, pointing out the dangers before it is too late.

Perhaps the need for many of these books is born out of the Christian community being too passive in so many areas, especially not wanting to cause offence to non-believers and those of other faiths. Sadly, more and more Christians are happy to affirm that 'everyone has their own way of doing things'. Not wanting to appear judgemental of others has become an easy way to avoid standing up for what is right.

MacArthur brings our attention to the dangers of seemingly small compromises and falsehoods creeping in to the church. He never makes light of the constant and real activity of the devil. He urges us not to be timid. If we don't know our enemy how can we protect ourselves? MacArthur is in no doubt as to what our choice of weapon should be – God's word, the Bible (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17). By answering life's most important questions with what God teaches us in His word, we engage both our hearts and our minds. Perhaps some think this makes Christians appear naïve and content to bury their heads in the sand. In fact, God's word does just the opposite. It engages our brains in a way no one and nothing else ever could, purely because of its very nature, the fact that it is literally God's word. It tells us things about ourselves we thought no one else knew. It confirms the longings and burdens of our hearts. It contains everything we see in the world. Whether that be the state of mankind, the church and its workings, God's handiwork in nature, instruction for peaceable living and the order and necessity of justice, how we should treat those around us.

The Bible truly does tell us everything, so that if we had nothing else but God's word, it actually would be 'enough'. Having said that, God has given us the ability to reason, investigate, analyse and debate what we see around us in all its complexity and beauty, that ability which bears God's mark of creation itself. It all points to God's glory and is tightly wound up in His perfect purposes. The overwhelming charge from each book to Christians everywhere must be to preach the word faithfully. When we trust and obey Him God gives grace, joy, encouragement, strength and courage that increase our love and praise for our Saviour. There is no debate on what Jesus' view of scripture was. When Jesus speaks to the Pharisees and Sadducees, He constantly calls them out on either adding to God's law or not living it out truly in their hearts. All this comes from a rock-solid commitment to the sole and final authority and sufficiency of the word of God. Would we dare to doubt what Jesus so clearly had absolute confidence in? Perhaps the hard question for us all is, are we lukewarm Christians? Is there room in our lives for such costly faith?



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THE CHARACTER CRISIS

By John MacArthur

Society has suffered terrible decay as the love of iniquity has trumped noble character. Sadly, what Western culture once regarded as virtuous and good has become almost unrecognizable. Take a few minutes to consider the importance of character, find its source, and commit yourself to the quest—the quest for character.

Character. It has an old-fashioned sound to it, like a faded relic of the Victorian era. We live in a materialistic culture where prestige, prosperity, and popularity are valued more than genuine integrity. In fact personal

character hardly seems to matter very much at all nowadays - at least in the realms of mass media, entertainment, politics, and pop culture.

Only a few select moral qualities are still prized by society at large. They are chiefly liberal community values such as diversity, tolerance, and broad-mindedness. Sometimes they are even called virtues. But when traits like those are blended with hypocrisy or employed to justify some other iniquity, they become mere caricatures of authentic virtue.

Meanwhile, genuine individual virtue - the stuff of which true, timeless, praiseworthy character is made - has been formally relegated to the sphere of "personal" things best not talked about openly. These days, even an elected national leader's personal character is supposed to be treated as a wholly private matter.

As a result, our society's most prominent celebrities include countless people who actually are known best for gigantic character flaws. Notice, for example, the people who usually grace the covers of celebrity magazines; very few are decent role models. Often they are actually people who exemplify the worst kinds of character traits. No morally sane, thinking parents would ever hope for their own children to

*"The only societies
that confer celebrity
status on immoral and
villainous people have been
cultures in serious decline
and on the precipice
of utter ruin."*



emulate the lifestyles or embrace the values of most of our society's best-known figures. Big personalities are highly revered anyway, because celebrity itself counts more than character in a society without any moral anchor.

In fact, over the past few decades so many famous people in our society have been charged with serious crimes that a cable television series is devoted exclusively to covering stories about the legal problems of some of our culture's favourite figures. Still, both the public and the media continue to confer celebrity status on more and more bizarre characters. How have we come to this? The greatest cultures throughout human history have always reserved the highest positions of eminence and respect for true heroes - people who distinguish themselves by great self-sacrifice, moral excellence, or some truly great accomplishment. The only societies that confer celebrity status on immoral and villainous people have been cultures in serious decline and on the precipice of utter ruin.

One of the universally understood rules of thumb that governed western society until a few short decades ago was that people who achieved fame had a duty to be wholesome role models. Even men and women who weren't really of sterling virtue in private sought to keep their character flaws hidden from the public - because if their moral defects became known, they lost their star status. Political figures could not remain in office if they were found culpable for any scandalous moral indiscretion.

That is no longer the case. Today's celebrities proudly flaunt their decadence. With the rise of a massive entertainment industry in the second half of the twentieth century, celebrity became a cheap and shallow commodity. Honest character is now seen as totally optional - or worse, hopelessly unfashionable. As a matter of fact, in certain segments of today's entertainment and music industries, authentic virtue would be practically incompatible with fame and success. Some of the best-known figures in the recording industry, for example, are avowed gangsters who openly glorify evil in their lyrics. It is frightening to contemplate the future of a society where so many people so badly lacking in character can attain celebrity status so easily - and often hang onto their fame and influence no matter what crimes

they commit.

The Bible says that is exactly what happens when a society rejects God and thereby incurs His righteous judgment. Romans 1:21-32 describes the downward path of a culture abandoned to sin. Take note of the roster of evils that finally overwhelm every fallen society. The list closely resembles everything currently fashionable in the world of entertainment and celebrity:

Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Romans 1:28-32)

That describes our culture to the letter, doesn't it? People today literally entertain themselves with iniquity, heedlessly applauding those who sin most flagrantly. Society today makes celebrities of people who in our grandparents' generation would have been deemed the most contemptible rogues. Almost everything that used to be considered shameful is now celebrated. We therefore live in a culture where personal character and individual virtue are rapidly evaporating at almost every level. Virtue and infamy have traded places.

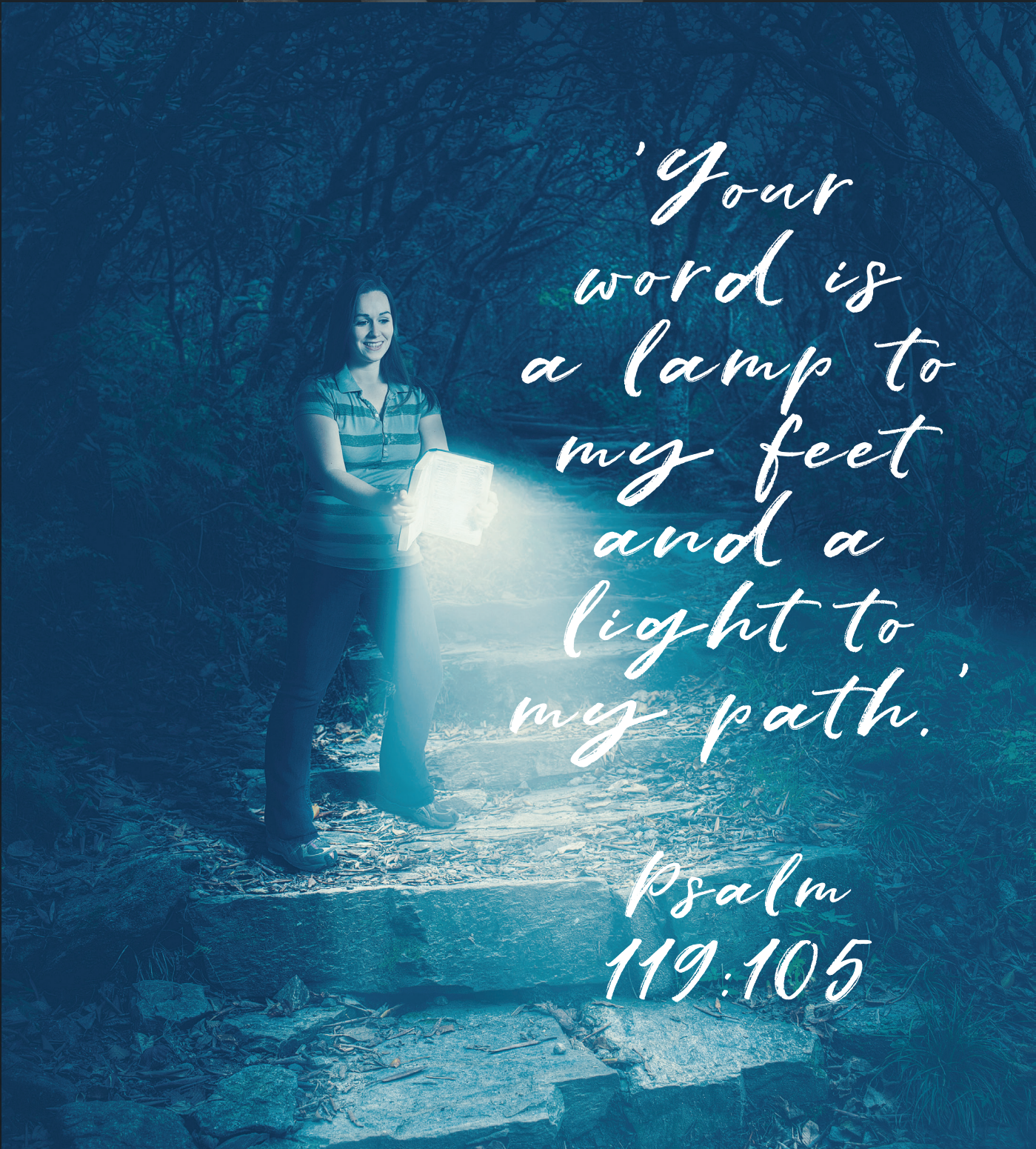
According to the Bible, God designed us to be men and women of exemplary character. He repeatedly commands us to pursue what is virtuous and shun what is evil. From cover to cover in Scripture, iniquity is condemned and virtue is exalted.

Clearly, we are supposed to be men and women of excellent character. We're commanded to "hold fast what is good [and] abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

But where do we go to learn how to do that? Popular culture will not point the way for us. Scripture alone is a reliable lamp for our feet and light for our path (Psalm 119:105). God's Word points the way in the quest for character.

The Bible contains numerous lists of positive character qualities. Second Peter 1:5-8, for example, gives a catalogue of virtues and urges us to add to our faith. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, the qualities of

authentic love in 1 Corinthians 13, and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, all list similar traits that describe true excellence of character. Truly excellent character is actually a reflection of the moral nature of God Himself. For that reason, all virtues are interdependent and closely related. And all of them are the fruit of God's grace. As you study biblical virtue, may you perceive the true beauty of Christ's character and desire to see it reproduced in your own life.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a striped polo shirt and dark pants, stands on a stone path in a forest. She is holding an open book that glows with a bright light, illuminating the path ahead. The background is a dense forest with trees and foliage. The overall color scheme is a deep blue/teal tint.

*'Your
word is
a lamp to
my feet
and a
light to
my path.'*

*Psalm
119:105*



THE PASTOR'S JOB DESCRIPTION

By Cameron Buettel and Jeremiah Johnson

CEO, president, even king — there are several leadership models that inform and define how modern pastors function in their churches. And with the current obsession with innovating new leadership styles, techniques, and structures, you can be sure that many more will rise in popularity in the coming years.

But the one leadership model that Scripture repeatedly emphasizes — the shepherd — has been cast aside and trampled over by many of today's church leaders.

While it might not be the most relatable illustration for modern audiences, the Holy Spirit did not include disposable metaphors in the Word of God. Let's not pretend that we have outlived the shelf-life of the New Testament, or that we need to breathe twenty-first-century life into an ancient text.

Why Does God Call Them Shepherds?

The writers of Scripture did not land on the imagery of shepherds by coincidence, or for lack of a better option. God chose it for a specific purpose: to illustrate precious truths about the role He designed for pastors. Employing the rich metaphor in Acts 20:28-31, Paul helps us understand the work the Lord has set before His shepherds:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among

your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

Paul highlights three basic duties for every godly shepherd: watch out, care, and guard.

Watch Out

All successful shepherds are vigilant. You can't spot thieves or other threats to your flock if your eyes are constantly wandering and distracted - you can't even keep track of the sheep. Fundamental to the shepherd's job description is an attitude of watchfulness. And Paul says that the true shepherd's vigilance starts with his own self-examination. How can a pastor rightly appraise the spiritual needs of his people if he can't properly assess the nature of his own heart? Conversely, how can a self-deceived leader ever provide leadership worth following? In his commentary, John MacArthur explains how biblical leadership hinges on faithful self-examination:

The first step in being on guard is self-examination. After a whole chapter of exhortation to the young preacher (1 Tim. 4:1–15), Paul summed up what he had said by calling Timothy to examine himself (verse 16): “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself

and for those who hear you.” He charged Timothy to scrutinize his life and doctrine to make sure both honored God. Such was crucial to his own perseverance and to the salvation and perseverance of others.¹

God's faithful shepherd is careful and thorough when it comes to examining himself before the Lord. He understands the gravity and influence of his own spiritual condition, and is vigilant in identifying sin that could encroach upon his flock — particularly sin in his own life.

Care

The shepherd's job is not just about watching out for his flock. He doesn't merely sit high above them in a lookout tower — his primary work is accomplished at ground level, in and among his sheep. John MacArthur describes what that vital work looks like:

After making sure that his own life (and consequently that of his family, 1 Timothy 3:4–5) is in order, a leader's second priority is the spiritual care of his flock. Positively, that care involves the feeding and leading of all the flock. The metaphor of a flock and a shepherd is often used to describe God's relationship to His people. It is an apt one, since sheep are helpless, timid, dirty, and in need of constant protection and care. . . .

Shepherd is from poimainō, a comprehensive term encompassing the entire task of a shepherd. The most important part of that task, however, is to feed. In John 21:15–17, Jesus three times instructed Peter to care for His sheep. The second time He used poimainō, but the first and third times boskō, which has the more restricted meaning of “to feed.” Obviously, then, the primary task of an under-shepherd of the Lord's flock is to feed the sheep. Sadly, many under-shepherds today fail to do that, seemingly content to lead their sheep from one barren wasteland to another. The tragic result is a spiritually weak flock, ready to eat the poisonous weeds of false doctrine, or to follow false shepherds who deceitfully promise them greener pastures, while leading them to barren desert.²



No faithful shepherd would permit his sheep to starve; nor would he encourage them to gorge on junk food, or let them wander to find whatever sustenance they might prefer. It's his job to keep them healthy, well-nourished, and fit.

Moreover, he shows the same care for all of his sheep. He's not a CEO, concerned only with the bottom line and looking to cut out anyone and everything that's not working. On the contrary, the shepherd shows extra care to those sheep that are struggling. His love for his entire flock is equal and comprehensive, and he labors to see that their needs are faithfully and thoroughly met. The Lord doesn't call men into ministry so they can be ruthless, heavy-handed, or dismissive with their flocks. Pastors must prioritize the spiritual health of their people, and sacrifice themselves to meet the needs of those under their care.

Guard

Finally, Paul warns shepherds to faithfully guard their sheep. He understood the threats that face a church — both from outside and from within — and he warns leaders to carefully guard their flocks from those deadly dangers. In his commentary, John MacArthur explains the vivid picture Paul paints:

It is not enough for a faithful shepherd to feed and lead his flock; he must also protect it from predators. Paul had no doubt that after his

departure false teachers would threaten the Ephesian church, as they already had entered the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:4) and the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:6). Whenever the truth is proclaimed, Satan can be expected to counter it with the lies of false doctrine. . . .

*True to Paul's prediction, false teachers did come in among the flock at Ephesus and attack it (cf. Revelation 2:2). Even more subtle than the attack of false teachers from outside the church, however, is the defection of those within. Accordingly, Paul warned them that "from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." "Perverse" is from *diastrephō*, which means "to distort," or "to twist." False teachers twist God's truth for their own perverted ends. "Draw away" is from *apospaō* and could be translated "to drag away" or "to tear away." If the under-shepherds are not vigilant, Paul warns, the wolves will drag their sheep away to devour them.³*

And one of the primary ways the shepherd protects his sheep is not by concealing and ignoring the threats outside the flock, but by faithfully warning them and training them to spot the dangers for themselves. Such faithful exhortation was a vital part of Paul's shepherding ministry.

The faithful shepherd must also warn his flock. Paul had done so during his own ministry at Ephesus; he reminds the Ephesian elders of how



“night and day for a period of three years he did not cease to admonish each one with tears.” “Admonish” is from noutheteō, which refers to giving counsel with a warning involved (cf. Colossians 1:28). The pattern of Paul’s ministry shows the importance of warning believers about false teachers. He admonished the Ephesians for a period of three years, caring for each one of the flock (cf. Acts 20:20). So compelled was he to warn them that he hardly had time for sleep, ministering “night and day” (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8). Nor was it a mere academic exercise for Paul - he punctuated his warnings with his tears. He wept because he knew the terrible consequences when false teachers infiltrate. Only by following Paul’s example can the faithful under-shepherd protect Christ’s flock from the savage wolves and diseased sheep who constantly threaten it.⁴

The life of a godly shepherd is one of vigilance, compassionate care, and tenacious defense for his sheep. His life is bound up in serving and protecting his flock, as he happily expends himself for their benefit. You can apply all sorts of illustrations to the individual tasks of a pastor, but none of them are as consistent and comprehensive as Scripture’s chosen metaphor. It’s no accident that God’s Word calls them shepherds - that’s what they are.

Don’t Starve the Sheep

One of the great tragedies of the influx of extrabiblical leadership models into the church is that it’s easy for pastors to lose sight of the work the Lord originally called them to do: feed His sheep.

Think about it: Say you’re a pastor who has modeled his ministry after successful CEOs. Your priorities could vary significantly — from growing the size and reach of your church, to dreaming up new ministry innovations, to developing a vision for the next season in the life of the church. And while none of those grand pursuits are necessarily wrong, should they be the things that occupy the majority of a pastor’s time? To put it another way, what should be the primary focus of the godly shepherd? The pastor’s job,

first and foremost, is to feed his sheep. That’s why Christ repeatedly charged Peter to do just that in John 21:15-17. Here’s how John MacArthur explains the depth of Christ’s exhortation:

Twice Jesus used the word “tend” (boskō), which could be better translated “to feed.” “Shepherd” (poimainō) embodies all the aspects of shepherding. The shepherd’s task is not to tell people only what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4), but to edify and strengthen them with the deep truths of solid spiritual food that produces discernment, conviction, consistency, power, and effective testimony to the greatness of the saving work of Christ. No matter what New Testament terminology identifies the shepherd and his task, underneath it all is the primacy of biblical truth. He is to feed the sheep.⁵

The godly shepherd’s ability to faithfully feed his sheep is a function of his own devotion to Scripture. Paul made that very point in his letter to Titus, when he described one of the necessary characteristics of godly pastors as “hold[ing] firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). In his commentary on that passage, John MacArthur explains what such devotion looks like in practice.

Pastors, therefore, are to love “the faithful word” of God, respect it, study it, believe it, and obey it. It is their spiritual nourishment. They are to be “constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:6). That involves more than mere commitment to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, essential as that is. It is commitment to the authority and sufficiency of God’s Word as the only source of moral and spiritual truth. . .

It is failure in the area of “holding fast the faithful word” that is largely responsible for the superficial, self-elevating preaching and teaching in many evangelical churches.⁶

The shallow faith and biblical illiteracy that pervades the church today is a direct result of too many pastors failing to faithfully perform their primary task. Starving sheep have been left to find spiritual sustenance for

themselves, and most of them can't discern what should be eaten and what should be spat out. Without a faithful shepherd, they fall into all sorts of peril.

Not only must the pastor faithfully feed his flock, he must also protect them — as Paul put it, he must “be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). In addition to the pastors who fail to even feed their flocks, there are many more that refuse to engage with the various threats to their sheep. They have no interest in condemning false teachers, exposing heresy, or wading into controversial issues. They're content to ignore any issues that don't directly relate to life within their churches, in spite of how that leaves their people uneducated and unprepared. John MacArthur explains why pastors must not surrender this vital duty in deference to society's distaste for conflict.

The dual role of the godly preacher and teacher is to proclaim and to defend God's Word. In the eyes of the world and, tragically, in the eyes of many genuine but untaught believers, to denounce false doctrine, especially if that doctrine is given under the guise of evangelicalism, is to be unloving, judgmental, and divisive. But compromising Scripture in order to make it more palatable and acceptable - whether to believers or to unbelievers - is not “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). It is speaking falsehood and is the farthest thing from godly love. It is a subtle, deceptive, and dangerous way to contradict God's own Word. The faithful pastor must have no part in it. He himself tolerates, and he teaches his people to tolerate, only sound doctrine.⁷

The godly shepherd doesn't cover his eyes and ears to threats on the horizon, and he doesn't delude his sheep into believing all is well when wolves are at the door. Out of his love and commitment to God's Word, he's compelled to take false teaching seriously, and to identify those who would perpetuate it among his people.

The faithful shepherd knows it is not enough to simply give his flock anything to eat. He loves them, protects them from danger, and brings them only the best nourishment he can provide.



What to Look for in a Shepherd

Humans are prone to over-value externals. We're too easily fooled by façades, eager to appraise every book by its cover. Rather than waiting to see the quality of a person's character and integrity borne out over time, we make snap decisions based on the physical qualities we see - or don't see. God rebuked Samuel for making that very mistake:

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

Too many churches today put too much stock in externals when searching for a pastor. They give too much credibility to a man's outward appearance, putting style far ahead of substance. They want someone young, attractive, polished, virile, exciting, funny, and cool. But those qualities have nothing to do with being a godly shepherd — in fact some of them might inhibit his ability to faithfully care for the flock.

Instead, the church needs to evaluate potential shepherds biblically - we need to see them as God sees them. God's Word is clear about the biblical qualifications for a shepherd. In his first letter to

Timothy, Paul lays out the precise measure of the man fit to care for God's flock.

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:2-7)

In short, the point Paul makes to Timothy is that the godly shepherd's character is borne out through his faithfulness over time. A pastor is qualified, not by his impressive externals, but by established patterns of integrity, purity, and righteousness. Churches searching for a new shepherd need to be less enamored by suave and sophisticated speakers, and more interested in a man's spiritual maturity.

In addition to the qualifications Paul spells out above, it's helpful to consider the actual work a pastor is called to, and how prospective shepherds might fit that role. As we have already noted, the shepherd's primary role is to feed the sheep. In an article titled "More Than Just a Preacher," John MacArthur explains what it looks like to faithfully feed God's flock.

The pastor's goal is not to please the sheep, but to feed them—not to tickle their ears, but to nourish their souls. He is not to offer merely light snacks of spiritual milk, but the substantial meat of biblical truth. Those who fail to feed the flock are unfit to be shepherds (cf. Jeremiah 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34:2-10).⁸

When looking for a new pastor, churches need to consider more than just a candidate's preaching style - they need to evaluate the substance he delivers. You wouldn't hire a chef who couldn't cook, or a pilot who couldn't fly. If a man is unable or unwilling to feed his sheep the rich nourishment of God's Word,

he's not fit to be their pastor.

Another element goes hand-in-hand with feeding - godly shepherds must also protect the sheep. Here's how John MacArthur describes this vital function of God's shepherds:

Sheep are almost entirely defenseless - they can't kick, scratch, bite, jump, or run. When attacked by a predator, they huddle together rather than running away. That makes them easy prey. Sheep need a protective shepherd in order to survive.

Christians need similar protection from error and those who spread it. Pastors guard their spiritual sheep from going astray and defend them against the savage wolves that would ravage them.⁹

The faithful pastor isn't naïve or oblivious when it comes to his sheep. He's keenly aware of the threats to their safety and health. He doesn't venture as close as he can to the danger, or lead them into the unknown. He guards them carefully, and sacrifices himself for their protection. And when they do fall into danger, the godly shepherd must rescue the sheep. As John MacArthur explains, it's in a sheep's nature to wander and get into trouble.



A sheep can be totally lost within a few miles of its home. With no sense of direction and no instinct for finding the fold, a lost sheep usually will walk around in a state of confusion, unrest, and even panic. It needs a shepherd to bring it home. . .

Like lost sheep, lost people need a rescuer - a shepherd - to lead them to the safety of the fold. A pastor does that by pointing the lost toward Jesus, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).¹⁰

A godly shepherd knows how precious the sheep are to the Good Shepherd, and the blessed joys of belonging to His heavenly flock. Churches looking for a pastor need to look for a man passionate about the transforming work of the gospel - not merely accumulating professed converts, but growing faithful disciples and equipping them for use in the work of God's kingdom. That means the faithful shepherd cannot bounce from flock to flock. He can't have divided loyalties, or always be looking for a larger, more desirable flock. He's got to be grounded and committed to effectively lead the sheep the Lord gives him. And as John MacArthur explains, leading God's sheep involves more than just preaching.

Besides teaching, the pastor exercises oversight of the flock by the example of his life. Being a pastor requires getting in among the sheep. It is not leadership from above so much as leadership from within. An effective pastor does not herd his sheep from the rear but leads them from the front. They see him and imitate his actions.

The most important asset of spiritual leadership is the power of an exemplary life. First Timothy 4:16 instructs a church leader to, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."¹¹

Churches searching for a new pastor need to ask two important questions about every potential candidate: Is this a man who will faithfully lead us? and Is this a man we should follow?

Finally, godly shepherds exhibit tender care for their flock as they gently comfort the sheep. Brash, heavy-handed leaders don't make good pastors; pushovers

are just as bad. As John MacArthur explains, shepherds need to measure the needs of their individual sheep, and address them appropriately.

Sheep lack a self-preservation instinct. They are so humble and meek that if you mistreat them, they are easily crushed in spirit and can simply give up and die. The shepherd must know his sheep's individual temperaments and take care not to inflict excessive stress. Accordingly, a faithful pastor adjusts his counsel to fit the need of the person to whom he ministers. He must "admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with all" (1 Thessalonians 5:14).¹²

Anyone can give advice, comfort, or rebuke - a godly shepherd gives it with authority, precision, wisdom, and gentleness out of genuine concern for the needs of his sheep. If you are currently looking, or have occasion in the future to look for a new pastor, lean heavily on Scripture when evaluating his credentials and qualifications. The wrong man can do unspeakable harm to the flock of God - he can scar and wound the sheep, or drive them from the flock altogether. Conversely, the right man - a faithful, godly shepherd - is one of heaven's greatest blessings. And if your church enjoys the leadership of one such faithful shepherd, make a point this week to thank him for his faithful service. Your encouragement will be a blessing to him.

Footnotes:

1. John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 13-28 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 222.
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Why Christ Must Return

By John MacArthur

Scripture is neither vague nor equivocal on the promise of Christ's return. A large portion (by some accounts, as much as one-fifth) of Scripture is prophetic, and perhaps a third or more of the prophetic passages refer to the Second Coming of Christ or events related to it. It is undeniably a major theme in the prophecy of both Old and New Testaments. And regardless of what the scoffers say, Jesus is coming (2 Peter 3:3-10). World history is barreling toward the conclusion that God ordained. It isn't an end that will come as a result of nuclear war, environmental irresponsibility, or alien invasion; it is the one that comes by the purpose and plan of God, foretold in Scripture. Make no mistake—Christ will return! Here are nine reasons from Scripture by which you can know that Christ is coming again.

1. The Promise of God Demands It

The Old Testament is full of Messianic promise - that promised is its main focus. From beginning (Genesis 3:15) to end (Malachi 4:2), the entire Old Testament is filled with prophecies of the coming Deliverer - at least

333 distinct promises, by one count. Of the more than 100 prophecies dealing with the first advent of Christ, all of them were fulfilled precisely, literally. His riding on a donkey, the parting of his garments, the piercing of His hands and feet, and the vivid prophecies of His rejection by men in Isaiah 53 - all these might have been interpreted symbolically by Old Testament scholars before Christ. But the New Testament record repeatedly reports that such things were fulfilled in the most literal sense, so "that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Matthew 26:56; cf. 2:15; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:35; John 12:38; 15:25; 19:24, 28). Scripture says God "cannot lie" and that He will not change His mind (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2). What He has promised, He will do. The truthfulness of the Bible is at stake in the Second Coming.

2. The Teaching of Christ Demands It

Christ's earthly teaching was filled with references to His Second Coming (Matthew 24-25; Luke 21). When

He was on trial for His life, Jesus defended His own deity with a bold declaration of the Second Coming in the most triumphant terms. He told the High Priest, "You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). On the night of His betrayal, Christ told the disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself" (John 14:2-3). Not only is the credibility of God at stake in the Second Coming, but so is the credibility of His Son. If Jesus doesn't return, He's a liar.

3. The Testimony of the Holy Spirit Demands It

Since "God ... cannot lie" (Titus 1:2), His promise guarantees Christ's return. Jesus is truth incarnate (John 14:6); so His teaching also infallibly confirms the fact of the Second Coming. And the Holy Spirit, who

is called "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26), also testifies of the Second Coming of Christ through the New Testament writers. Whether the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 1:4-7; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; etc.), the apostle Peter (1 Peter 1:13; 5:4; 2 Peter 3), or the apostle John (1 John 3:2), again and again, through the inerrant Scriptures, the Holy Spirit adds His witness to that of the Father and the Son—Jesus is coming.

4. The Program for the Church Demands It

God is currently "taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name" (Acts 15:14) and gathering His elect into one great body, the church. The church's role is to be like a pure bride for God's own Son, ready to be presented to Him at His Second Coming. Paul uses that wedding imagery in 2 Corinthians 11:2: "I am jealous for you with godly jealousy; for I betrothed

*'set your hope fully
on the grace that will
be brought to you at the
revelation of Jesus Christ.'*

1 Peter 1:13

you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin." Marriage is a beautiful metaphor that pictures Christ's love and care for His church (Matthew 25:1-13; Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:6-9). And that's why we can be certain He will return to claim her, just as He promised (John 14:2-3). He will come back to get His bride.

5. The Corruption in the World Demands It

The world is a very wicked place, and when the "Son of Man [comes] in the glory of His Father with His angels ... [He] will recompense every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:27). "An hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice,

and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). That blessed hope of every believer (Titus 2:13) is the terror of the world. For unbelievers, His coming means immediate, impartial judgment (1 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Jude 14-15; Revelation 19:11-16); for believers - unmitigated joy! Jesus must return in order to execute just retribution on sinners and carry out the judgment He has promised.

6. The Future of Israel Demands It

In Paul's day Gentiles were coming into the church in greater numbers than Jewish converts, and in



*'But the
day of the
Lord will come
like a thief'*

2 Peter 3:10

Romans 11, Paul reminded them, "You, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them and became a partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree" (v. 17). But the time is coming when the natural branches will be grafted back into the olive tree (vv. 23-24), a phenomenon that Paul expressly connected with the return of Christ (v. 26). That is the day when Israel will mourn over the One whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10), and God will save them all (Romans 11:26).

7. The Vindication of Christ Demands It

It is inconceivable that the last public view the world would have of Jesus Christ would be that of a bleeding, dying, crucified criminal, covered with blood, spit, and flies, hanging naked in the Jerusalem twilight. Did you realize that after His resurrection, He never appeared in a public venue before unbelievers? Plenty of believers saw Him, touched Him, spoke to Him, and gave unanimous testimony that He was risen from the dead. But there is no record that unbelievers ever saw Him. But the unbelieving world will see His glory displayed to everyone. Scripture says, "Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (Hebrews 9:28; cf. Matthew 24:27). The Saviour who was humiliated, taunted, and put to death in a public display of humanity's hatred of God will return as conquering Lord in view of the entire world (Luke 21:25-27). And every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7).

8. The Destruction of Satan Demands It

Satan, though an already-defeated foe as far as Christians are concerned, still exercises a kind of dominion over this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 6:12; 1 John 5:19). But Christ is the only rightful ruler of this world, and when He returns, He will overthrow and destroy Satan completely. In Revelation 5, when Christ receives the seven-sealed scroll, the title deed of the earth,

He unleashes judgment with the crack of each seal (Revelation 6-7). The seal judgments give way to the judgment of the seven trumpets ((Revelation 8-9); the trumpet judgments lead to the judgment of the seven bowls (Revelation 16). Finally, after one last-ditch effort by Satan to retain his unlawful dominion over the earth, Christ Himself returns to vanquish the foe - He chains him, casts him into a bottomless pit, and finally confines him to an eternal lake of fire (Revelation 19). With that, Christ's victory over Satan the usurper is complete.

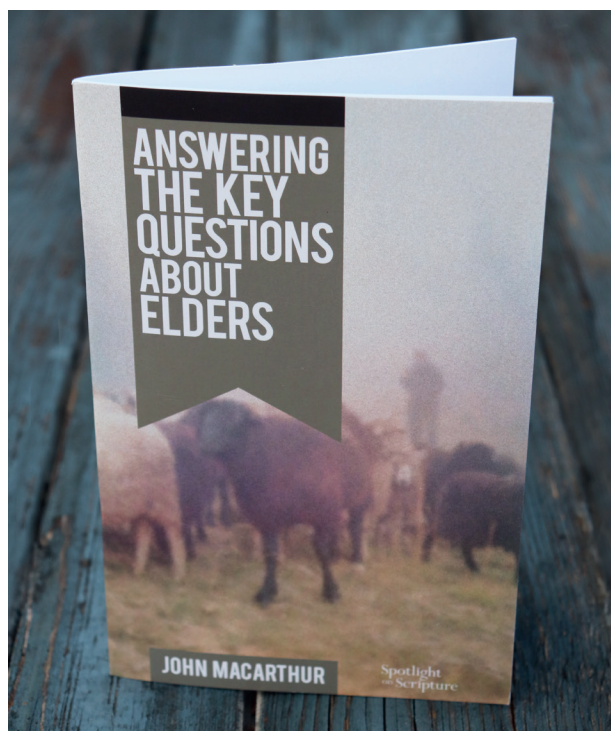
9. The Hope of the Saints Demands It

Only Christ's glorious, triumphant return can fulfil the hope of the saints - every true believer longs for that day. Paul characterizes Christians as those who "love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). The apostle John says, "Now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). The return of Christ will instantly usher in the fullness of our glorification. John then adds these words: "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (v. 3). This is the test of a healthy eschatology: Is your hope a sanctifying influence on your soul? Are you looking beyond the commotion of this world with the realization that you could soon meet Christ face to face, and are you preparing your heart and soul for that? Are you eager and watchful? Are you filled with joyful hope and expectation? That is the attitude to which Scripture calls us.

The Second Coming is not supposed to make you stop what you're doing to wait for the Lord's return. And neither should it motivate you to focus all your attention on the events and political developments of this world. Instead, it should prompt you to holiness as you direct your heart toward Christ, whose coming every believer anticipates with joy.

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Recommended Reading



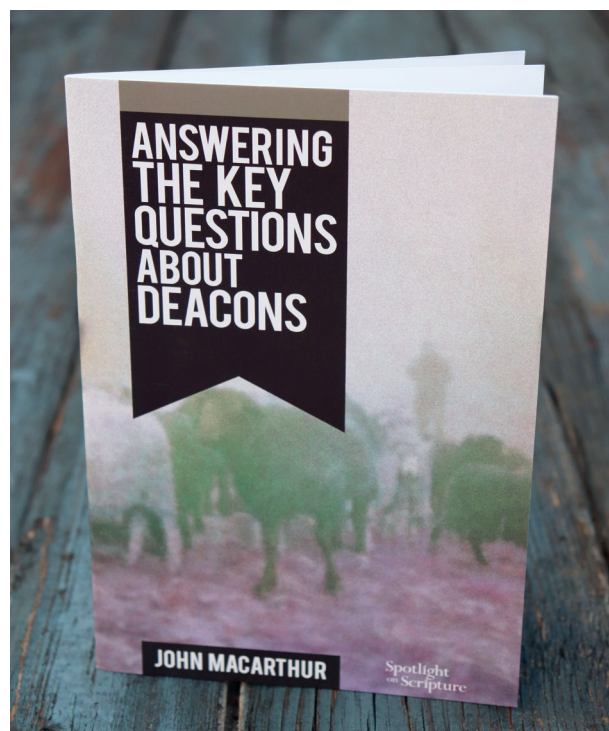
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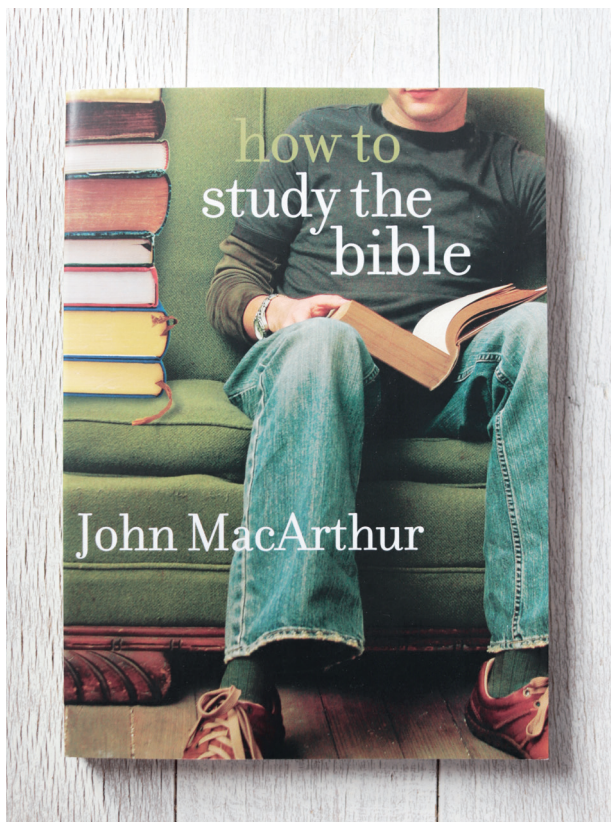
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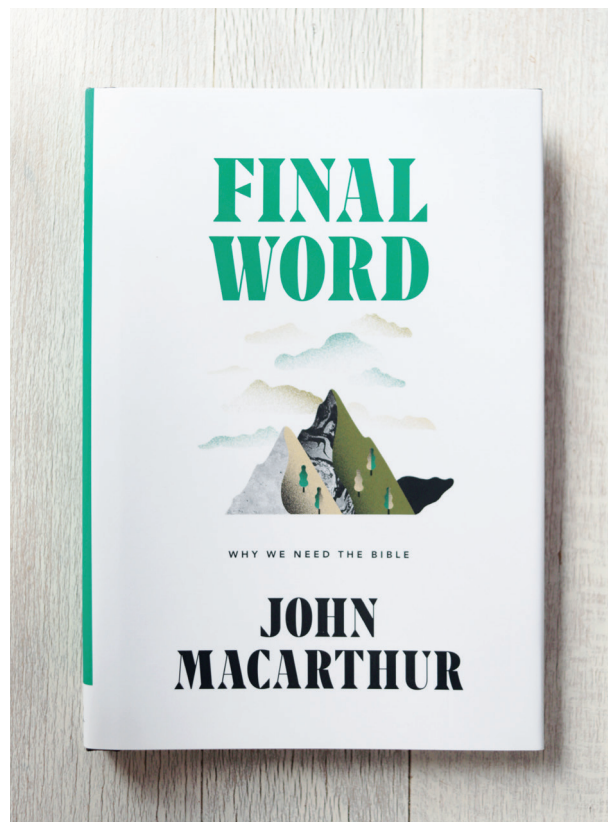
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"For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13)

ONE OF OUR PRINCIPAL TASKS IS TO PROTECT BELIEVERS FROM BEING...

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