

"We have come to expect meaty, edifying, superbly written devotional entries from Chris Anderson and his team. Here are thirty-one more, and they don't disappoint."

PHIL JOHNSON EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF GRACE TO YOU



THIRTY-ONE DAILY READINGS TO HELP YOU
BE GOSPEL-SATURATED ALL DAY, EVERY DAY

gospel

MEDITATIONS

— for the —

CHURCH

CHRIS ANDERSON
JOE TYRPAK
& DAVE DORAN

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MEDITATIONS
— for the —
CHURCH

“We have come to expect meaty, edifying, superbly written devotional entries from Chris Anderson and his team. Here are thirty-one more, and they don’t disappoint.”

—**Phil Johnson**, Executive Director of Grace to You
pastor at Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA,
and founder of the website, *The Spurgeon Archive*

“Deeply rooted in Scripture, compelling, insightful, and motivating. These inspiring and carefully crafted meditations reflect a profound love for the local church, an institution that is all too often underappreciated by many Christians today.”

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—**Milton Vincent**, pastor of Cornerstone Fellowship Bible Church
in Riverside, CA, and author of *A Gospel Primer for Christians*

“Since I believe that solid biblically based devotions are one of the main components for promoting spiritual growth, I am always glad to review and recommend devotional writings that are biblically sound, theologically accurate, and practical in their application. Spurgeon’s *Morning and Evening* devotional is a classic example that has been used of the Lord in this regard. And, over the years I have recommended Spurgeon’s book to many Christians because of its biblical, theological, and practical accuracy. Well, I recommend this book by Pastors Tyrpak, Anderson, and Doran for the same reasons. I encourage Christians to read and apply the solid biblical counsel that is found in this devotional. If you use it faithfully and with a submissive heart, I think you will be greatly strengthened and enriched by your reading and meditation on the truths found in the book.”

—**Wayne Mack**, counseling professor at The Master’s Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, and at Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation, charter member of Association of Biblical Counselors, founder of ACBC Africa, elder at Lynnwood Baptist Church, Pretoria, South Africa, and author of many books including *Strengthening Your Marriage* and *Life in the Father’s House*

“I found these devotionals doctrinally substantive, local church centered, balanced, and stimulating. My heart was lifted in praise to God and challenged to faithfulness.”

—**John Greening**, GARBC National Representative, church consultant, and author of church educational resources and the book *Strong Church*

INTRODUCTION

We live in an individualistic society. Everything is personalized. Coke *cans* have our names on them. Coke *machines* provide literally thousands of mix-and-match options. Even music providers cater to individuals: a Pandora commercial boasts that “your thumb is the DJ.”

It’s no wonder that this rugged individualism has crept into the church, or even made professing Christians creep *out of* the church. Even Christians are prone to think in terms of “me.” But the New Testament unmistakably and unabashedly speaks in terms of “us.” Most of the New Testament was written *to* local churches or their leaders. Much of it is written *about* local churches. When Christ restores the fallen Peter, He tells him three times that he will prove his love for Jesus by caring for Jesus’ flock. And when Christ lays out His plan for the ages, He says, “I will build my church.” When Acts records the spread of Christianity throughout Asia and Europe, it records the planting of local churches. When sinners become saints, they invariably are baptized and connected to local churches. Even the magnificent book of Revelation was written to seven local churches. The church matters. To quote the carefully chosen name of the company that publishes this book, the “Church Works!”

Motivated by a deep love for Christ’s church—flawed as it is on this side of heaven—it is our pleasure to provide thirty-one devotional lessons that focus on the nature, mission, and corporate life of the local church. The book’s target audience isn’t leaders, but entire congregations. Each devotional seeks to connect the life-giving truth of the gospel with life-shaping applications for the congregation. We’re praying that the Lord will use these lessons to increase the love of Christians for both our Savior and His church. Read them with an open Bible and an open heart, praying that the Lord will work in your life and in your church. That’s a prayer He will surely answer, for His glory!

Chris Anderson for Joe Tyrpak and Dave Doran

Dedicated to the members of Inter-City Baptist Church, Killian Hill Baptist Church, and Tri-County Bible Church, our “joy and crown” (Philippians 4:1). May Christ continue to build His church as we labor together with you!

Kudos to Dan Totten for his exceptional editing. Thank you for partnering with us in this endeavor.

THE CHURCH, A PILLAR AND BUTTRESS

“The church of the living God [is] a pillar and buttress of the truth.” 1 TIMOTHY 3:15

Did you know that gospel hymns were sung within a few decades of the historical events of the gospel? One such hymn is found in 1 Timothy 3:16. The brief chorus rehearses six historical realities of the gospel: Jesus’ incarnation, resurrection, exaltation, worldwide proclamation and reception, and glorious ascension. What glorious truth! The eternal God became a man. He died but didn’t stay dead. He rose again and now sits on a throne surrounded by angelic powers. The gospel is mightily advancing throughout the world as the enthroned Messiah always lives to pray for His people. That’s truth that every Christian should confess, study, wonder at, sing, and live out. (Each of these responses is implied in 1 Timothy 3:16.)

God calls the church to be “a pillar and buttress” of that amazing truth. In using the imagery of pillars and buttresses, Paul is thinking of the church (as he often does) as God’s temple. And even though it’s a bit strange to speak of us supporting the gospel, Paul teaches that God has designed the church to uphold and promote the gospel like the temple pillars and buttresses upheld the roof and walls of that beautiful structure. How does a church exalt the gospel? In the verses that follow, Paul explains at least three ways in which churches (especially the leaders) lift high the gospel.

You lift high the gospel when you receive God’s gifts with thankful enjoyment (4:1–5).

False religion was rampant in Paul’s day, and it’s rampant in ours. When Paul warns Timothy about demonic deception from those with seared consciences, you might think he’s referring to occultic witches. Instead, the demonic, deceptive teaching he’s concerned about is this: required celibacy for church leaders and required abstinence from certain foods. That demonism describes most of professing Christendom today! Paul teaches that godliness is not marked by ascetic, man-made rules, but by enjoying God’s blessings with thankfulness (vv. 3–4). As simple as it seems, if you receive God’s good gifts—everyday gifts like lunch and marital sexuality—with thankful enjoyment, you’ll lift high the gospel. You’ll show that the gospel has transformed you to live human life as God intended it: with God (not His gifts) at the center.

You lift high the gospel when you pursue godliness with toilsome exercise (4:6–10).

The antidote to man-made religion is a regular training regimen in good doctrine. Paul commands Timothy, “Train yourself for godliness” (v. 7). He says that everyone should agree with the conviction that bodily exercise has value for this life, but godliness has value for both this life and the next (vv. 8–9). A disciplined pursuit of growth in doctrinal understanding is not crucial for pastors only: It’s for every believer. You will not grow as a Christian, a Christian evangelist, a Christian husband or wife, or a Christian parent if you’re not toiling and striving to better understand what God’s Word teaches. Those who consistently pursue a fuller apprehension of God’s will for their lives exalt the life-changing truth of the gospel.

You lift high the gospel when you teach God’s Word with a transparent example (4:11–16).

Paul was concerned that Pastor Timothy give himself to reading Scripture publicly, making practical application of it, and providing doctrinal instruction (v. 13). But Paul was concerned with more than what Timothy taught. He was also concerned with how Timothy’s teaching was backed up by his life. If you regularly teach the Word, you must carefully watch your words, actions, love, and purity (v. 12). The Lord doesn’t expect you to be a perfect Christian, just a *pattern* Christian. He doesn’t expect you to be an extraordinary Christian, just an *ordinary* one. You will lift high the gospel by living an unhypocritical life, being careful to walk what you talk. And remember, the “only thing” that’s at stake in lifting high the gospel is people’s salvation (v. 16).

Let the advancement of the gospel fuel your thankfulness, toil, and transparency.—JOE

WORD-FILLED CHURCHES SING!

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and . . . singing.” COLOSSIANS 3:16

Colossians 3:16 commands the church to make the Bible lavishly at home in our hearts. A healthy church is so saturated with the Scriptures that the Word overflows in corporate communication: in teaching each other and in singing to the Lord. Because I love to sing, especially with my local church, I want to focus on the latter.

Congregational singing should be saturated with Scripture. The Bible doesn’t allow the church to sing whatever it wants. It tells us to sing the Word. We are to meditate deeply on the Bible, and that meditation is to seep into our songs—both those we choose and those we compose. We should insist on songs that have overt Biblical concepts, quotations, and allusions. Sure, our lyrics should be artistic and emotive, not banal rhymes that inspire neither mind nor heart. But they must always, *always* be Biblical. In fact, some should be more than Biblical—they should be *Bible*. Sing the Psalms! Whether old or new, our songs should be vehicles that carry to our hearts and from our lips the very Word of God.

Congregational singing should make much of Christ. It is significant that the Bible is described in Colossians 3:16 as “the word of Christ.” It’s not just a collection of truths about God and His people, occasionally mentioning Christ. Both Testaments focus on Christ as the Savior of fallen humanity. Even “psalms” are categorized by Paul under the heading “the word of Christ.” All Scripture points to Christ, but the Bible’s Christ-centeredness crescendos to a *fortissimo* in the book of Colossians. Paul urges Christians not to turn aside from Christ to philosophy, tradition, mysticism, or ascetic regulations (2:8, 16–23). He tells us that Jesus is the exact representation of the invisible God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the only Savior from sin, the Head of the church, and the Reconciler of all things to God (1:13–23). After all this doctrine—some of the most stirring in all the Bible—Paul tells us that Christ should fill our *songs*. Jesus is both the *subject* of our songs (we sing “the word of Christ”) and the *object* of our songs (we sing “to the Lord”). Here’s a good rule of thumb: If an Orthodox Jew, a Mormon, or a Jehovah’s Witness could sing most of our songs with hearty agreement, we’re probably singing the wrong songs.

Congregational singing should overflow from joyful hearts. Our text began by describing the gospel’s dwelling “in” us, and it concludes by teaching that our songs should be the expression of “grace in [our] hearts.” As important as text and tune are, they’re pointless if they don’t come from hearts transformed by God’s grace. True worship doesn’t start with well-rehearsed choirs and loud singing; it begins with congregants who are mindful of God’s grace extended to them through the gospel of Jesus Christ. That’s why Paul in Ephesians 5:18–19—the other “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” text—insists that our songs flow out of hearts that are filled with the *Spirit* in addition to being filled with the *Scriptures*. Praise is a spiritual, grace-enabled exercise.

Music is a wonderful thing. It allows us to combine our voices in beautiful and unified praise. And it’s a powerful thing—it both *reflects* and *shapes* church doctrine, perhaps as much or more than sermons! I value preaching as a God-ordained means of grace. But the reality is that songs often stay with us long after sermons are forgotten. Think of it this way: How many of John Wesley’s sermons can you quote? Probably none. But you can almost surely recite several of the hymns written by his brother Charles, like “And Can It Be,” “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” and “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” Hymns stick, so let’s use them well. May our churches be *Bible-fed* and *Spirit-led*, and may our songs and singing show it!

Let the gospel so thrill your heart that it overflows in Christ-saturated singing.—CHRIS

THE POWER OF GODLINESS

“Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.” 2 TIMOTHY 3:5

Although this verse directly addresses false teachers, it also reveals a profound truth about the difference between false and genuine Christianity. When Paul says that the false teachers hold to “the appearance of godliness” that denies “its power,” he opens our eyes to see both the danger of formal religion and the power of genuine godliness. It is very possible to be religious without being regenerate. It is possible to adopt a form of Christianity without having the substance of it.

This text asserts that genuine godliness has power. The implication of the text, in light of its context, is that the power of godliness changes a believer so that he or she is different from the characteristics that Paul enumerates:

For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. (3:2–4)

Remember, these characteristics belong to people who have “the appearance of godliness.” It is only appearance because true godliness contradicts these characteristics. The degeneration that Paul warned about is counteracted by the power of regeneration. To be religious without a radical break from the course and conduct of the world is to hold a form of godliness that denies its power. Genuine Christianity is never less than sound doctrine but is always more than doctrine alone. A creed without transformed conduct is something different and something less than genuine Christianity. That’s because genuine Christianity is built on the power of God through the gospel and is displayed in the power of godliness that transforms sinners into Christlikeness. This should not surprise us. The God we worship is the living God, not the dead idols of pagan rituals or the empty ideas of pagan philosophy. We serve a God who hears and acts on behalf of those who wait for Him (Isaiah 64:4). We have been saved by a God who, by His Spirit, strengthens us with power in the inner person (Ephesians 3:16–17) and who works in the saved both “to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Lifeless and powerless Christianity is not biblical Christianity. The bizarre beliefs and practices of some segments of professing Christendom must be rejected, but we must be careful not to allow our desire for genuine spiritual power to be too shallow. The fact that some abuse the concept of spiritual power is no reason for us ignore it. Without spiritual power, genuine Christian experience is impossible—We must have the power of the gospel and the dynamic work of the Spirit!

If our Christianity is powerless, then it is not real. If our Christianity is real, then God’s power is operating in our lives and congregations. Gospel-believing churches should be places where God’s power is evident in the conversion of sinners, the transformation of believers, and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Let’s not play Christianity; let’s really live it!

The Apostle Paul prayed specifically for the believers in Ephesus to understand and experience the resurrection power of God in their lives (Ephesians 1:19–20). Will you pray for that in your own life? Will you intercede for your believing family and friends to be “strengthened with power through his Spirit” (Ephesians 3:16)? Will you pray that the proclamation of the gospel from your church is “not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5)? May God graciously pour out fresh gospel power to transform our lives and magnify His mercy among the nations!

Let the gospel powerfully transform your life and church!—DAVE

MISSIONS ONE BY ONE

“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” LUKE 19:10

Do you believe that people can really change? Many don't think it's possible. But Zacchaeus' life stands as a testimony to Jesus' power to change lives. When the account opens, Zacchaeus is a rich, notoriously deceptive, and money-hungry tax collector who wants to catch a glimpse of Jesus. When the account ends, Zacchaeus, because of his encounter with Jesus, is joyful, honest, and generous—a changed man at the core. Zacchaeus' greed gave way to generosity. His secrecy and deception gave way to a transparent confession of Jesus as his Lord. So can people really change? The answer of this passage is *yes*. How does it happen? The brief account provides at least three answers.

Life change is made possible by Jesus' trip to Jerusalem (v. 1). It's significant that Jesus was only “passing through” Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. For ten chapters Luke has been emphasizing Jerusalem as Jesus' target destination (see Luke 9:51; 13:22; 17:11). In Jerusalem “everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. . . . He will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked. . . . After flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise” (18:31–33). The gospel—the good news of what Jesus accomplished at Jerusalem—makes life change possible. Change in Zacchaeus didn't work like a diet in which willpower exerted over time gradually leads to noticeable change. Instead, life change is made possible when you personally encounter the historical Jesus who died and rose again in Jerusalem.

Total life change is possible for the most despised and disadvantaged (vv. 2–4). Zacchaeus wanted to get a glimpse of the famed evangelist but had several things working against him: He was a tax collector, he was wealthy, he was short, and he was just one individual in a vast crowd. Because of these disadvantages “he could not” see Jesus (v. 3). Luke's account of the gospel emphasizes Jesus' special interest in the rejects of society—in unclean shepherds, helpless widows, barren women, ignored children, overlooked beggars, hated Samaritans, possessed lunatics, notorious prostitutes, untouchable lepers, and ostracized tax collectors. So Zacchaeus is typical of the people that Jesus came to seek and save. The fact that he was despised and disadvantaged meant he was the target of Jesus' saving mission. Because they misunderstand Jesus' mission, many Christians try to hide the problems and shame of their past. How sad! Don't act like your past never happened. Instead, frankly rehearse the disadvantages of your past in order to highlight Jesus' remarkable mercy to you.

Change occurs when you respond to Jesus' invitation (vv. 5–7). Jesus could've walked past Zacchaeus, but He didn't. Although He had no obligation to love this sinful man, Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus' house saying, “Today in your house I *must* come to stay” (my translation). Jesus' choice to love Zacchaeus was scandalous. The crowds hated him for doing so (see also Luke 5:30; 7:39; 15:2). When Jesus invited Himself, Zacchaeus immediately responded: He gladly took Jesus to his house. And that was the last time anyone saw the old Zacchaeus. Change occurs when you encounter Jesus, hear His personal invitation to you, and gladly welcome Him.

Churches are most Christlike when we seek the conversion of one disadvantaged sinner at a time. One-at-a-time evangelism is an approach that's often belittled today by Christians who imagine the church's mission to be much bigger. But what kind of evangelistic strategy makes the biggest difference? Sociologist Robert Woodberry researched for more than a decade to determine what makes Third World countries develop. He concluded:

Areas where [nineteenth-century conversionary] Protestant missionaries had a significant presence in the past are on average more economically developed today, with comparatively better health, lower infant mortality, lower corruption, greater literacy, [and] higher educational attainment (especially for women). (*Christianity Today*, January/February 2014, pp. 39–40)

How do churches today seek the good of entire cultures? By preaching the gospel to sinners, one Zacchaeus at a time.

Trust the gospel to bring remarkable change, one disadvantaged sinner at a time.—JOE

DON'T MESS WITH CHRIST'S CHURCH

“If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him.” 1 CORINTHIANS 3:17

We are far too cavalier about criticizing churches, whether our own or the church down the street. In some circles, it’s actually a mark of spiritual discernment to uncork on the “compromising” church across town, even if it’s a gospel-preaching church. I’ll never forget witnessing an example of this about a decade ago. The church I pastored had a makeshift “float” in a community parade. We wore t-shirts to identify ourselves and distributed literature to invite people to visit our services. Another church—a more contemporary church—was doing the same thing, but their float was a stage for their church’s praise band. Their music had a serious “thump” to it; ours didn’t. We had some notable differences, but we both preached the gospel. I was heartsick to see the disgust—indeed, the hatred—on the face of a friend who glared at them across the parking lot. I was alarmed because I’ve had similar feelings myself. Is such antipathy justified? Perhaps if the church is really flawed? I believe the answer from 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 is *no*.

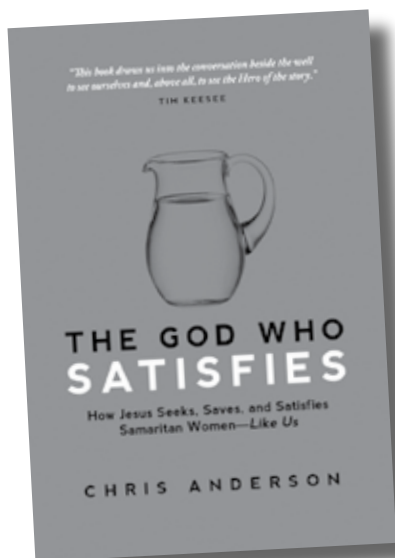
Even a flawed church that preaches the gospel is God’s temple (v. 16). The local church at Corinth was famously flawed. Paul called their behavior “fleshly” (3:1–3). He reprimanded them for divisiveness (1:10–17; 3:4), tolerance of gross immorality (5:1–2), lawsuits against fellow Christians (6:1–8), abuse of spiritual gifts (chapters 12–14), and other church problems. And yet, Paul referred to them as “saints” who have been “sanctified” (1:1–2). He referred to them collectively as the temple of God (3:16). In the Old Testament God uniquely resided in the tabernacle and temple. But since Pentecost God has lived within His people as His *living* temple (1 Peter 2:5). Even the miraculous symbols in the upper room in Acts 2 highlight the fact that God’s new residence is His people, not a building. (See *Gospel Meditations for Missions*, Day 16.) God lives in individual Christians (1 Corinthians 6:19–20), but He also lives in us collectively—the local church is His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16–17). That’s why the pronouns in 3:16–17 are plural in the original Greek: “You [plural, as a group] are God’s temple and . . . God’s Spirit dwells in you [plural, as a group].” Bottom line: The church—even a church with as many problems as the church at Corinth—is God’s temple.

God will “destroy” those who harm His temple—the local church (v. 17). First Corinthians 3:16 is inspiring. But 1 Corinthians 3:17 is frightening. God will destroy those who destroy His temple. Here’s the imagery: Think of how protective God was of the Old Testament temple. Only believers could enter—and only after going through symbolic purifications and sacrifices. Beyond that, only priests could access the Holy Place. Entrance into the Holy of Holies was even more exclusive: Only the high priest could pass beyond the veil—and that only once per year, on the Day of Atonement. When people defiled the temple, they died. Think of Hophni and Phinehas (1 Samuel 2:12–17, 22–26, 34; 4:11). Can you imagine rushing into God’s temple and defacing it, say, through graffiti or vandalism? Only if you had a death wish! But Paul says that those who harm the local church are actually defacing God’s temple—and God will *destroy* them! This is vitally important. The whole point of chapter 3 is to reprove division in the church. Paul argues for unity from a variety of angles, but his climactic argument is that the church—even a church like Corinth—is God’s temple, and therefore God will destroy those who harm it.

What does that mean to us today? We should value the church, imperfect as it is. And we should fear raising a finger—or a voice—against it. To put it bluntly: *Don’t mess with Christ’s church!*

Let the gospel instill in you a holy protectiveness for gospel-preaching churches.—CHRIS

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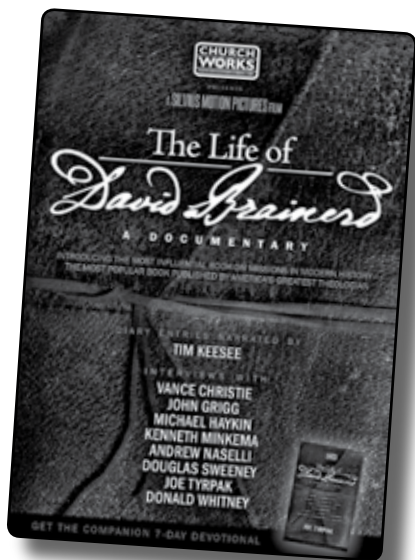


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Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and
author of *Complete in Him* and *Beginning at Moses*

"This DVD documentary represents an excellent introduction to the life and ministry of the famed missionary. Together the interviewees paint a picture of Brainerd that is informed by the best scholarship, is honest about his various struggles and failures, but remains warmly sympathetic to Brainerd's life, thought, and missionary zeal. The film itself reflects quality craftsmanship and includes many beautiful shots of locations that were prominent in Brainerd's life, original manuscripts of his writings, and portraits, statues, and other memorials of figures discussed in the documentary. The film should prove a helpful resource for use in local church Sunday School classes, small groups, and discussion groups."

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University and writer for the Jonathan Edwards
Center at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School



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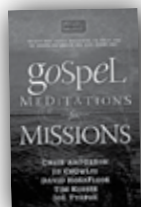
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—**Milton Vincent**, author of *A Gospel Primer for Christians* and pastor of Cornerstone Fellowship Bible Church, Riverside, California



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“By almost any standard—the intentionality of local churches to train, assess, and prepare prospective missionaries; the length of time it takes a missionary to raise support; the little sense of gospel partnership we have with the missionaries we do support—Western Christians don’t do missions very well. The reason we don’t do missions well is that we’ve not thought about missions well. This book has our poor thinking about missions in its crosshairs.”

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—**Joel Beeke**, president of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, and editor of *Taking Hold of God: Reformed and Puritan Perspectives on Prayer*



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“This work is more than a mere devotional and collection of meditations for Christmas. These meditations are a mini Christology. I hope they will be read far beyond December. There is too much truth here to be relegated to the Christmas season alone. I highly recommend this work for your greater understanding and worship of Jesus Christ.”

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About the Authors



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