

PLAIN TRUTH®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

Remembering 9-11

in the Wake of 2020

By Greg Albrecht

Remember the dark days of despair immediately following 9-11? We were shocked and demoralized. Our nation had been attacked, and the reaction was swift and unequivocal. Our nation collectively focused on the common foe. We grieved, we united, we prayed and we joined hands.

Yes, there was a military and punitive response. Yes, nationalism thrived and there were many calls for revenge but they were tempered and measured, in the main. Our united mood of grief and mourning was accompanied by resolve to rebuild, restore and move forward. Out of the smoldering ruins and lost lives of the Twin Towers the vast majority, regardless of race, culture, gender and creed unitedly

determined to move forward.

Remember how carefully our leaders and nation at large tried, rightly so, to protect the rights and well-being of peace-loving Muslims, carefully making a distinction between them and violent terrorists who co-opted and sullied their faith? Our national leaders rallied against the vicious mob mentality that can result when one segment of the population becomes a scapegoat.

As we observe the 20th anniversary of 9-11 we do so in an entirely different world than that of late 2001 and 2002. **We observe the 20th anniversary of 9-11 in the wake of 2020.** Whereas the smoldering ruins of the massive destruction in New York City gave

birth to unity, the tragic events of 2020 have rekindled fires and aggravated deep fault lines of hatred, animosity and division.

As we look back on 2020, the national unity we recall, in the wake of 9-11, is contrasted with tribalism, animosity and hatred.

9-11 brought us together, the legacy of 2020 is tearing us apart. Some are calling for the radical destruction of the American way of life (they call it “cancel culture”). Some are worried that we are already in a civil war and deeply concerned whether or not we can avoid all out war and terrible bloodshed. Many, on all (or both) sides are making accusations and

engaging in “revenge politics.”

2020 was a terribly imperfect storm of COVID-19, lockdowns, massive unemployment and economic readjustment. 2020 was apocalypse now. With so many “staying safe at home,” social interaction resulted in skyrocketing depression and anxiety, often peaking at three times that of pre-2020 rates.

Racial tensions became part of the mix. Many demonstrations for justice were peaceful, but sadly, others provided cover for opportunistic looting, rioting and open season on law enforcement. January 2021 arrived and with it the outrageous assault on the Capitol in Washington D.C.

In 2020 wildfires and hurricanes added more misery all the while

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We Believe

We believe the more Jesus is at the center of faith then the healthier our

faith tends to be—and conversely, when Jesus is diminished or avoided, then toxic beliefs and practices are more likely to find their way to prominence. Our CWR/PTM statement of faith is titled “We Believe”—based on the organization of the Apostles Creed:

God—We believe in one eternal, triune God who is three co-essential, yet distinct Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ—We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, begotten of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, fully God and fully human, the Son of God and Lord of all, worthy of worship, honor and reverence, who died for us as a supreme expression of God’s love, was raised bodily from the dead, ascended to heaven and will come again as King of kings.

The Holy Scriptures—We believe the Bible constitutes the divinely inspired written revelation of God, the foundation of truth, the record of God’s revelation to humanity.

Salvation—We believe that human salvation is the gift of God, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not earned by personal merits or good works.

The Church—We believe in the universal body of Christ and the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two major creeds came out of early Christian history—one called the Apostle’s Creed and the other called The Nicene Creed. “Creed” is an English word that is derived from the Latin word *credo*—*credo* literally translated means “I believe.”

Each statement in The Apostle’s Creed, the earliest and most well known of the creeds, begins with the words “I believe.” Some have asked, “OK, so you see the need for Jesus to be in the spotlight and center stage. But what does that look like? Can you give me some examples of how you are different from other Christians? Just what kind of a Christian are you anyway?”

CWR/PTM is **Christianity without the religion**. We are in harmony with the universal body of Christ, of which Jesus is the head. That said, we absolutely disagree with Christ-less religion (including that found within modern day Christendom) and adamantly believe in grace-based faith expressed by following Jesus as a way of life.

Why *without* the religion? Religion is generally defined and understood as a systematic and organized collection of teachings and practices that, if and when adhered to and followed, will mean that God will be more pleased than he would have otherwise been.

When understood from this perspective, religion wars against the grace of God, for the grace of God says that our relationship with God is not at all, in any way, earned as a result of our performance of rules, rituals or regulations.

When we say “All Jesus All the Time” we mean *religion-less Christianity*, which is a term popularized by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis during World War 2.

CWR and PTM are all about following Jesus. Here are a few examples of what we believe

following Jesus looks like which differ with assumptions found throughout Christendom:

- As Christ-followers we are members of the body of Christ—the church is what we are, far more than a place we go and a building we attend. Church membership or church attendance, or lack thereof, can be helpful or detrimental but not absolutely central to faith. Jesus is.

- The cross of Christ changed everything—including the rules and regulations of the Old Covenant.

- We refuse to believe in a God of wrath and anger, who is against you and me. The gospel of Jesus Christ is clear—God is all about his love and grace. We reject teachings that have God the Father torturing and killing his Son on the cross so that he wouldn’t have to kill and torture us. We do not serve a god who must be appeased, whose sense of holiness and righteousness have been so offended that someone must die so that his wrath can be satisfied.

- In the same vein, we reject the hell that religion in fact has fabricated—a hell that religion needs because it must keep people in fear. We reject a hell of eternal conscious torment (ECT) as being entirely incongruous and at odds with the revelation of the Father in the Son —a God of love, grace, mercy and compassion.

We believe “All Jesus All the Time” is *Christianity Without the Religion*. □

Join us for “All Jesus All the Time—Why?” at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of September 12, 2021.

political venom was dramatically stirred up by the media, both “sides” pointing the finger and digging a deeper pit from which the United States must struggle to emerge.

Will We Come Together or Will We Fall Apart?

Whereas the terrorism of 9-11 introduced us to the reality of the deep hatred of external terrorism fueled by religious terrorism, 2020 introduced toxic, systemic internal terrorism from so many sources.

It is time for healing. It is time for all of us to bury resentment and lay aside the oh-so-human desire to see others “get what’s coming to them.” The sweet taste of revenge is short lived and leads to an endless cycle of bigotry, malice and hostility.

It is time for us to join hands and lock arms and repent from incrimination and name-calling and resolve, together, to work toward healing and reconciliation.

It is time for grace. It is time for the peace—the shalom of God. It is

time to forgive. It is time to move forward. It is time to seek individual and national repentance. It is time for all of us to repent of anger, name-calling and resentment which will always and forever prolong and perpetuate hatred, violence and evil.

It is time for those on the right and those on the left to renounce fear-mongering voices that seek to improve their own advantage at the expense of continuing hatred and animosity. It is time for peace, not war—for love, not hatred—for mercy, not revenge.

It is time for us to beat weapons into productive tools for planting and building.

It is time for us to fill our hearts with the grace, mercy and love of God, for politics and politicians will not save us.

It is time for us to come together rather than fall apart.

It is time for a vision of hope. It is time for new life rather than the darkness of evil, hatred, racism and violence, so that we may walk toward the light—and the Light is Jesus Christ.

It is time for us to adjust to whatever a “new normal” might be, whether we like it or not. We must face reality and not run from it. We must make the best of the world as it is rather than wallowing in self-pity and remorse.

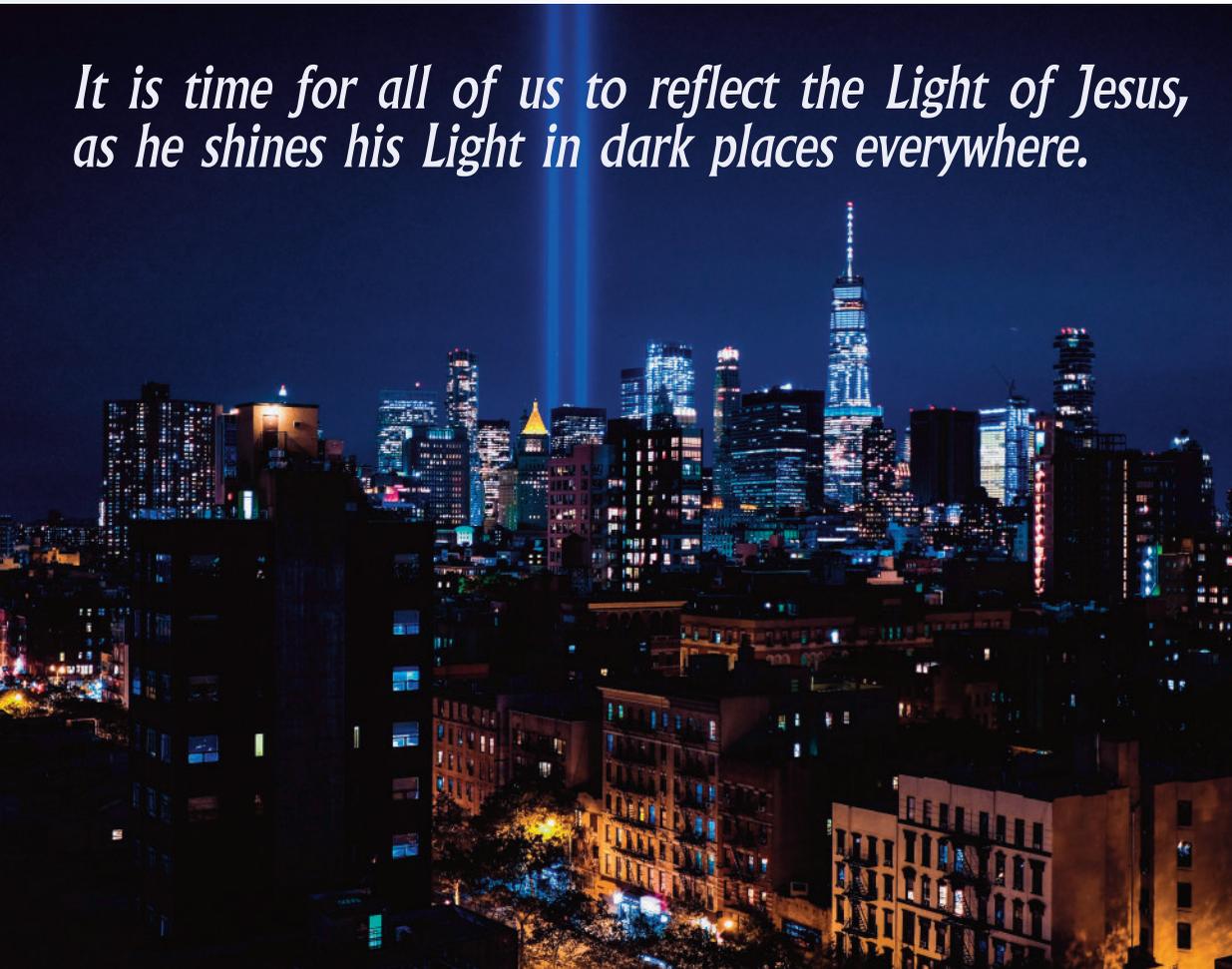
It is so easy and tempting to assume it is possible to geographically relocate to a peaceful place where none of the evils of our world confront us. But we can never “get away from it all.”

We do well to remember the words of 20th century Russian dissident and author Alexander Solzhenitsyn, as he spoke of the tempting proposition that problems elsewhere will never infect our home and nation. “There is always this fallacious belief: ‘It would not be the same here; but such things are impossible.’ Alas, all the evil of the twentieth century is possible everywhere on earth.”

When the Old Testament people of God were exiled in Babylon, living in a foreign land ruled over by their captors, Jeremiah encouraged them to make the best of a difficult and strange new normal:

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

It is time for all of us to reflect the Light of Jesus, as he shines his Light in dark places everywhere.



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Dear Lord,

We thank you for your mercy and your grace. Empower us all, no matter how aggrieved we may feel, to set aside bitterness and rancor, and make peace.

As we observe the 20th anniversary of 9-11, we mourn the lives lost, lives that could have been, while we give thanks for the lives that have continued and the positive fruit that has been borne out of the horrors of 9-11. As we observe the 20th anniversary of 9-11 we do so with the raw and fresh wounds of 2020 still present, and amongst those who, for their own nefarious purposes, remain at war with all who love peace, mercy, grace and forgiveness.

May we seek reconciliation and make peace with all men and women, who are all, as we are, your children. May we seek forgiveness for the way we and our forefathers have treated others. May we seek forgiveness for the way we have used and abused others to further our own interests and feather our own nests.

May we also seek forgiveness for those we have scapegoated and against whom we have sought revenge and retribution.

We thank you God for your forgiveness, for all of us, in spite of all that we have done and failed to do. We thank you God for the invitation to pick up our cross and follow Jesus in a life of self-giving sacrificial love, serving others in his name—forgiving them as you have forgiven us.

We thank you our Father for not keeping score of our many failings and faults, and that you have forgiven us even as we have kept score of those who have harmed us and against whom we have retaliated and perpetuated vendettas.

Live in us Jesus so that we ask forgiveness of any who may feel that our gender, race, religion, creed or political preference may have oppressed them and caused them pain and heartache.

Live in us Jesus so that we may not seek revenge from anyone we feel represents those who have persecuted us and those who share our gender, race, religion, creed or political ideologies.

Live in us Jesus that we may lay aside the “right” to seek revenge and self-sacrificially, in your name, lay down our lives serving others, whether or not we feel they have a right to be served. May we serve others, rather than demanding that others serve us.

Live in us Jesus that we may experience and radiate your *shalom*—a shalom that is more than the absence of hostilities and violence, but a shalom of wholeness, unity, tranquility and harmony. Let this gospel of your kingdom come to fill and permeate our world just as it does in heaven.

Live in us Jesus so that we always remember you—may we always remember—long after cobwebs formed in an empty tomb and the blood dried on an empty cross, your words, our Lord and Savior, that fill our hearts and transform our lives. *By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another* (John 13:35).

Thank you for the Light of Jesus that shines in our hearts and souls, and by your grace, is reflected in and through us to others. Jesus is compassion and kindness and he overcomes violence, revenge, settling scores and opportunism.

This we pray, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. □

Imagine

If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God (Matthew 5:23-24, The Message).

What if every pastor, priest, rabbi and imam assigned homework to their congregations about forgiveness and reconciliation—homework that had to be completed before further attendance?

What if Jews were told not to bother to return until they attempted to befriend and listen to several Muslims? What if Muslims were given the same assignment about Jews?

What if Catholics were assigned to make friends with several Protestants and really listen to them? What if Protestants were given the same assignment about Catholics?

What if Democrats were told they must initiate and maintain friendships with several Republicans before they were allowed to vote in the next election ...and what if Republicans were given the same challenge about Democrats?

What if men and women who wear a badge were assigned to make a deliberate and intentional attempt to befriend those who are, according to statistics, more likely to be arrested than others?

What if people who harbor ill will, grudges and hatred toward all who wear a badge or wear a uniform in the armed forces went out of their way to have coffee with those they distrust, dislike and want to defund?

If we all remain trapped in our entrenched fortress of beliefs, throwing rocks at all who differ from us, what does all of our rock throwing say about the faith we hold near and dear?

What if we all loved our neighbors and prayed for our enemies? **WHAT IF...?** □

Think on These Things

By: Ed Dunn

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (Philippians 4:8).

When we change the way we look at things, the things we look at change.
—German Theoretical Physicist,
Max Planck (1858-1947).

There is an unmistakable importance to *mindfulness*, or *presence*, to use a different word. The thoughts we hold closely within our hearts and minds do indeed matter.

The terms, *mindfulness* and *presence*, are ones we may hear quite often these days. The practice of thinking about what we think about, as a way of staying mindful or present, can be helpful in observing how our thoughts influence our emotions.

But why is *mindfulness* or *presence* so important? Why do our thoughts matter so much?

The times we've lived through in our recent past have presented an honest challenge to our collective mental health. The uneasy combination of intense political

divides, racial divides, economic divides, and the fact that no one seems to want to listen to anyone else, has had a definite impact on our society and possibly even on our own sense of peace.

The number of cases and prolonged effects of Covid-19, and the ways in which the virus has changed our world, has caused general unease and even acute depression in many.

Uncertainty about the future has become an acute anxiety and a common worry—a worry that has robbed many of us of more than a few good nights' sleep.

Jesus has something to say about *mindfulness*, or *presence*, and the thoughts we hold closely within our hearts and minds. When Jesus says, *No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back* (Luke 9:62) or *Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself* (Matthew 6:34), both of his thoughts can be insightful into what may be going on in our minds.

Are we thinking about circumstances or events that happened in the past which may lead us to stop moving forward? Are we consumed with anxious cares and worries about what may happen tomorrow or the next day?

Even if we are present, are we consumed with the negativity of a

world that looks at times as if it's gone completely mad?

Jesus' words can help us look carefully at whether or not we are *mindful* and *present*, or preoccupied with thoughts that just end up troubling us and robbing us of a present peace.

Can we in any way approach, enter, direct or alter our past from where we stand now? Can we abide in or act upon our eventual future from where we sit in this moment now?

Unfortunately, no, we cannot. All we can truly do is live within this present moment. We can be *mindful* and *present* in this moment alone, right now.

We Have a Choice in Our Thinking

Paul tells us to "*think on these things.*" His words more than imply that we have a choice in our thinking. To think on things present that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy—in a world where so much has been, and continues to be, just the opposite—is not easy.

However, we have the choice to set our perspective in a positive direction.

We can choose to replace negative thoughts with positive ones, and in so doing, we may just bring about positive change.

When Max Planck stated, “when we change the way we look at things, the things we look at change,” he was talking about our perspective, to be sure.

As a theoretical physicist, however, he may well have been talking about far more than just perspective alone. Planck may have been suggesting that our thoughts can be impactful upon the material world around us.

To consider Planck’s idea in light of Paul’s words, if we think about things true, we may end up with more truth around us. If our thoughts are pure, we may experience more purity.

Honest thoughts may lead to honesty, just thoughts, to justice, and so on. Although I must admit that theoretical physics and what may or may not happen in the quantum field around us is well above my paygrade, I sure like thinking about the idea.

Either way, Jesus, Paul and Max Planck all give us good “food for thought” as to what we think about.

Mindfulness, or **presence**, can help us to avoid living our lives in the past or too far into the future, in either endless regret or worry.

As Jesus gives us ten verses about worry within his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25-34), we do well to follow him.

Paul gives us a focus if our thoughts are negative, even if in the present moment: truth, honesty, justice, purity, loveliness, good news, virtue and praise are all perfect subjects to hold closely within our hearts and minds.

And Planck gives us perspective, that when we make this change in our thinking, we may well be changing more than just what is taking place within us.

Mindful presence, thinking about what we think about, can create both peace within and a better world around us. □

Ed Dunn is an author, blogger, editor and host of “This Month at PTM.”

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Forgiveness and Apologies

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

As a mother of a one-time prodigal son, I've often thought of the concept of forgiveness. Of course, I forgive him of those past grievous sins against me. In fact, I'm convinced that forgiveness is imbedded in the DNA of motherhood. Has he asked for my forgiveness? Carlton prefers to let bygones be bygones. And that's okay. In fact, I'm wondering if that might be the most appropriate way to come together after a rupture. It is how I was raised. Did we five siblings ask for forgiveness each time we wronged one another? No. In fact, I can think of dozens, if not hundreds, of times we should have begged for forgiveness and didn't.

One such episode was right after trucks and rollers paved our country road. On the edges loose asphalt was begging to be fisted into tar balls. Eight years old, I had a plan and a lieutenant in my younger brother. We hid in the ditch when our older brother was returning from crow hunting and hurled our balls at him. Missing our target, we managed to stain our own clothes. Our mother was furious. She didn't ask for an apology, and she wasn't prepared to forgive. Rather, she would make us kneel in the front yard while she spanked us with her wooden spoon. But not right away. She put it off for several days. It was torture. We begged her to get it over with.

I'm not recommending this kind of punishment for the guilty one—nor a lack of apology. But I wonder if this is one way as adults we already do—and should—move beyond serious offenses. In some cases, when the offense is appalling, as in sexual abuse, insisting that the one assaulted forgive the attacker is not only shortsighted but also unreasonable. That might happen after an extended period of time and after the guilty individual confesses, shows remorse and clear evidence of a transformed life. But we dare not

cavalierly quote Jesus on forgiving seventy times seven. Those lines are anything but the whole of biblical teaching and modeling on forgiveness.

Over the past two decades I have been seriously wronged by several individuals, including a relative, a co-worker, and a neighbor. If I were to lay out my grievances, I have no doubt that most fair-minded people would agree with my position. For example, some years ago my nearby neighbor on the Trail along the Grand River accused me of poisoning his pets. He claimed he had a night video

I did not ask for, nor did I expect an apology... I have forgiven him...I celebrate the renewed warmth, each one a tender mercy.

showing me sneaking into his yard with the poison. I learned about it only when a sheriff deputy stopped by to give me a copy of the report from the neighbor. The deputy warned me to keep my distance. Those of us living along the river refer to ourselves as river-rats, which is what we are. During floods, sometimes our stuff ends up in neighbors' yards, so it's hard to be entirely separate from each other. In this case, however, there were other factors present. Our neighbor was at times drinking so heavily that he hardly made sense.

There would be two things that changed our relationship. Our beloved dog had run off and I was frantic. He felt bad and joined in the search (though giving us wrong information as inebriated people sometimes do). And he had a run-in with the law and ended up quitting alcohol cold turkey. Once sober, a warm neighborliness slowly returned. I was delighted. I did not ask for, nor did I expect, an apology for his reporting me as a pet poisoner. I have forgiven him. The same has been true with other broken relationships. I celebrate the renewed warmth, each one a tender mercy. □

—Ruth Tucker



Quotes & Connections



“Charity means pardoning the unpardonable, or it is no virtue at all. Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all. And faith means believing the incredible, or it is no virtue at all.”

—G.K. Chesterton

“Holding a grudge is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die.”

“He who cannot forgive another breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself.”—George Herbert

“There are a few things in this world you can’t get but can only be given, and one of these things is love in general, and another is the love of God in particular.”

—Frederick Buechner

“Christ goes through the ages, questioned anew, misunderstood anew, and again and again put to death... Christ is betrayed by the kiss. Wishing to be done with him means always to fall down with the mockers and say, ‘Greetings, Master.’ There are only two ways of encountering Jesus; man must die or he must put Jesus to death.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*

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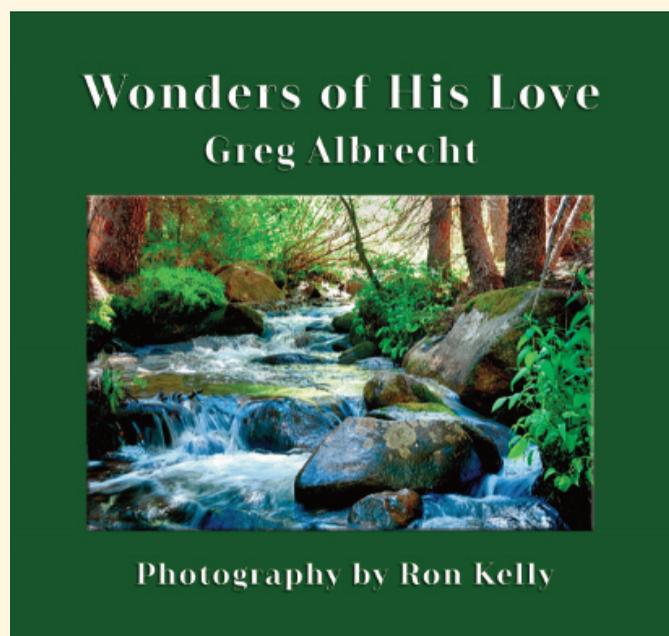
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