

# PLAIN TRUTH®

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

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## Unadorned Clay Pots

By Greg Albrecht

*Remember, our Message is not about ourselves, we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful.*

*If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That's to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us (2 Corinthians 4:5-7, MSG).*

**A**pril 11, 2009—A 47-year-old woman named Susan Boyle auditioned on the British television show, "Britain's Got Talent." Up until that date, Susan Boyle was an unknown—

some may have defined her as a "nobody."

When Susan was introduced and walked out on the stage, the audience saw a shy woman with bushy eyebrows and hair looking as if it had not been brushed recently. They saw a woman whose dress and demeanor looked homespun at best, perhaps even homely and frumpy—no one would have described her as being stylishly dressed.

The video of her audition (which has now been watched by upwards of 300 million people and counting on YouTube) shows members of the audience rolling their eyes and openly mocking Susan Boyle's appearance when she first walked out on the stage. They presumed she was someone who obviously did not deserve to perform on that stage for *surely, given what she*

*looked like, she had no talent whatsoever.*

Simon Cowell, one of the three judges, welcomed her, asked her a little about her background and what she was going to sing. She announced in her Scottish brogue that she would sing, "I Dreamed a Dream" (from one of my favorite books and stage plays, *Les Miserables*).

With everyone in the audience prepared to see her miserably fail, with skepticism as thick as a London fog enveloping the theater, Susan started to sing. It took only a

few seconds for jaws to drop in amazement. No one expected the beauty and stunning quality of her voice. Members of the audience rose to their feet, clapping and cheering. Some were in tears, amazed at the beauty of her voice and perhaps some were ashamed of their hasty preconceptions about her abilities, now proven obviously wrong.

For one, brief shining moment, the old maxim "never judge a book by its cover" received a glorious affirmation in the body and voice of Susan Boyle.

As Susan sang, "I Dreamed a Dream," it was indeed a dream—Susan Boyle was the embodiment of dreaming a dream, and in the process overturning stereotypes and assumptions about what it means to be talented and successful.

Every time I watch that performance—and I just did a few

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## Freedom to Forgive

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom* (2 Corinthians 3:17, NIV).

*Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you.*—Jean Paul Sartre

*Freedom lies in being bold.*—Robert Frost

I've been thinking about the words Freedom and Forgiveness a lot of late, considering how the two words may both work together and support one another. You see, two close friends of mine have recently had a falling out. These two close friends have had a falling out over a common source of strong opinion and emotional tension these days.

Unfortunately, hurtful words have been exchanged and harmful events have taken place. A bitter difference of political opinion, made personal, is to blame. At this point, there looks to be little chance for forgiveness and reconciliation. Sadly, my friends' falling out is not unique in the times and circumstances in which we live. Many once-close friendships have been strained.

As I consider these two words in the context of what has happened, it seems to me that *forgiveness* requires a space, a *freedom*, if you will, around a hurtful word or a harmful event. That space, that freedom, can allow time to process the reoccurring thoughts and strong emotions around what has taken place. The act of forgiveness may be terribly difficult. The space, the freedom, required to forgive, may need to be quite wide and

long in its duration. In time, if one of my two close friends first considers the freedom to forgive, he or she will most likely need to be bold. Taking that first step toward forgiveness is not for the faint of heart.

Jesus had much to say on the topic of forgiveness. When Peter came to Jesus asking how many times he should forgive a brother or sister, Jesus' reply of *seventy-seven*

**Freedom can only come as a result of forgiving others, and...forgiving ourselves. As Christ-followers, we live free in Christ Jesus. Our lives have been redeemed and forgiven and given to us anew, free from the hurtful words and harmful events of our past.**

*times* to Peter's suggestion of a mere *seven* times is telling (Matthew 18:22, NIV). I wonder, why is *forgiveness* so important? Why did Jesus give us this teaching? Is there a *freedom* that can come from the act of *forgiveness*?

St. Augustine was famous for saying: *Unforgiveness is like me taking the poison and expecting the other person to die.* I read St. Augustine's words to say that to be unforgiving hurts us. To be unforgiving forces us to hold on to and replay hurtful words and harmful events. In a real sense, to be unforgiving binds and enslaves us.

That's been so true for my two close friends, who just seem to be stuck in the story, stuck in the ugly words and destructive events of

what happened. Neither can seem to break free.

Jean Paul Sartre's words, *freedom is what you do with what's been done to you*, strike me as truly profound. Sartre's words present us with a real challenge. Will we allow the things that have been done to us bind and enslave us? Are the things that have been done to us going to keep us stuck in the story, in the endless replaying and retelling of hurtful words and harmful events? What about the things that we ourselves have done to others? *Freedom* can only come as a result of forgiving others, and while we're at it, forgiving ourselves.

As Christ-followers, we live *free* in Christ Jesus. Our lives have been redeemed and *forgiven* and given to us anew, free from the hurtful words and harmful events of our past. Believing and acting from this, we transcend what has happened in our lives.

We live boldly in Christ Jesus knowing *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*. We can then extend the *freedom* and *forgiveness* we've received to others. We can extend that *freedom* and *forgiveness* to those who have hurt or harmed us.

Although my two close friends are nowhere near forgiveness and reconciliation at this point, I hold out hope. I hope that with time they will come to see the opinions and tensions differently. I hope that with space, they will both heal. I hope that by living boldly, they will set one another free with the act of forgiveness. □

—Ed Dunn

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minutes ago—I well up in tears. It is unbelievably inspiring.

### Somewhere Along the Way...

Somewhere along the way, much of Christendom has forgotten that we, individual Christ-followers, are but unadorned clay pots. We are not much to look at... we are all like Susan Boyle as she walked out onto that stage to audition.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul spoke of the *unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives*—he had already written of this same theme in his first letter:

*Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of "the brightest and the best" among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these "nobodies" to expose the hollow pretensions of the "somebodies"? That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horns before God. Everything that we have—right thinking and right living,*

*a clean slate and a fresh start—comes from God by way of Jesus Christ. That's why we have the saying, "If you're going to blow a horn, blow a trumpet for God" (1 Corinthians 1:26-31, MSG).*

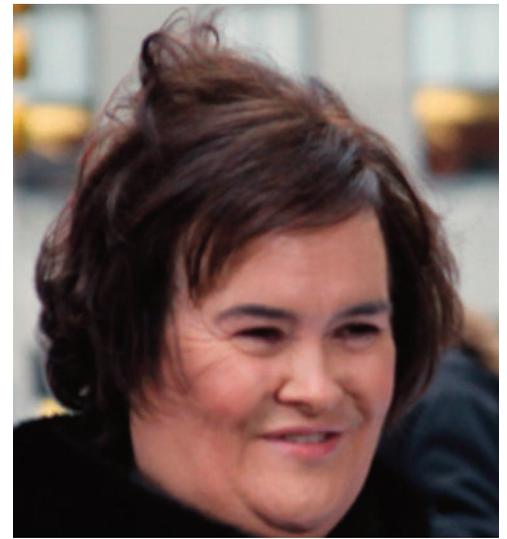
Somewhere along the way, the trumpet blowing about faith has become all about individual churches and denominations, dogmas, doctrines, rituals and ceremonies, rather than God's grace and love. Externals of religion are prized above spiritual treasure.

Somewhere along the way, Jesus, our friend, our servant and our risen Lord who produces humility within those in whom he lives, has been replaced by religious pride prancing through the world on a high horse of smug arrogance and conceit.

Somewhere along the way, the judgment and condemnation of big business religion has overwhelmed the modesty and humility of Jesus.

Our signature, introductory quote cited verses 5-7 in the fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians. Leading up to these verses, Paul explained the context about how and why the gospel of Jesus Christ—the Message —becomes obscure:

*If our Message is obscure to anyone, it's not because we're holding back in any way. No, it's because these other people are looking or going the wrong way and refuse to give it serious attention. All they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness. They think he can give them what they want, and that they won't have to bother believing a Truth they can't see. They're stone-blind to the dayspring brightness of the Message that shines with Christ, who give us the best picture of God we'll ever get (2 Corinthians 4:3-4, MSG, my emphasis).*



Susan Boyle, 2009

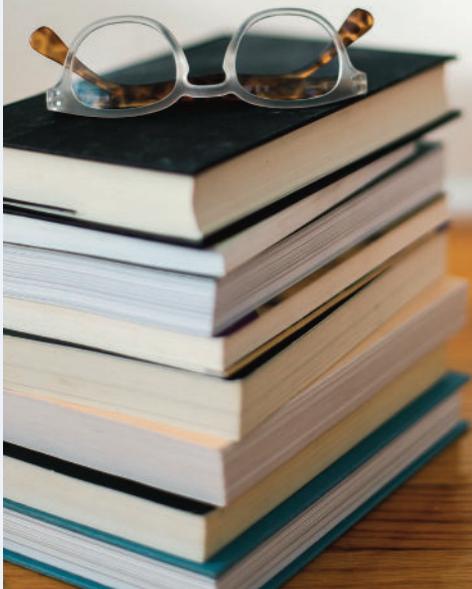
Somewhere along the way, people started looking for the love, mercy and grace of God in all the wrong places. Entranced and mesmerized by churches who compete with each other as to their longevity, their faithfulness and their accomplishments, forgetting that Jesus is the uncreated Son of God, who exists in eternity past, present and future, is perfect, holy and righteous and has accomplished all that humanity can never do. **Jesus is the best picture of God anyone will ever get!**

Somewhere along the way, many churches have become fragmented cocoons of dogmas, and holy huddles who revere doctrines and condemn any and all who disagree.

What do you suppose might happen if Jesus, somewhat like Susan Boyle, walked out on a religious stage today? If the incarnate Jesus, the humble carpenter from Nazareth, walked out onto a religious stage today, prepared to teach and proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God, the first reaction of the judges and the audience would be to presume him inadequate because he would not be wearing a religious costume. Jesus would be, and sadly is in some religious settings, rejected because **all they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness.**

When Jesus knocks on the doors of many churches, they fail to listen to him and do not welcome him (see Revelation 3:20). Perhaps

***For one brief, shining moment the old maxim "never judge a book by its cover" received a glorious affirmation in the body and voice of Susan Boyle.***



religion does not recognize Jesus because he lacks prestigious religious refinements. Perhaps when he is introduced before he speaks, upon being asked about his resume and credentials, when he reveals he has no advanced degrees in theology, the audience greet him with sneers and contemptuous, condescending smirks.

### **Unadorned Clay Pots Leak!**

There's an old story about a group of monks who lived in a monastery, in a desolate and unpopulated area of the world. One of the monks was reported—a sin he committed had been discovered. According to the monastery rules, all the monks had to gather as one, with the sinful fellow monk in front of them, so that they could determine the penalty their brother must pay for his sin.

When they had all assembled, they discovered that one of their number was not present. Father John was not there—so two of the monks went to look for him and tell him that he must take part in the judgment.

When Father John finally and reluctantly trudged into the assembly room he was carrying a leaking jug filled with water. When his fellow monks saw the leaking jug they asked John, "Why are you bringing this jug into our judgment, leaking water all over the floor?"

John said to all of his fellow monks, "St. Paul told us that each of us are but an imperfect jar of clay, but by God's grace he has given us a treasure in our flawed bodies. My sins run out from me like the water from this leaking jug. And today I am, as a flawed jar of clay, called to this assembly and asked to participate in judging a little water that has leaked out of the jar of clay of my brother?" ☐

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*What do you suppose might happen if Jesus... walked out on a religious stage today?*





# Thanks PTM—Keep on Rockin’!

## Letters from Our Friends

*Here are a few of the many letters we have received in recent months, thanking us for the life-changing ministry of PTM, which YOU help provide! On behalf of readers around the world—THANK YOU!*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Thanks PTM! Keep on rockin’—you all are doing excellent work!—Ohio**

I have learned so much and am still learning. Thank you for speaking to us about the truth of Jesus in a gentle and humble manner. I guess I never knew that God was made of real love, goodness, kindness and gentleness because of my church upbringing. It’s still hard for me to completely understand that God is a good Father, a real loving and caring Father, but I know he is.  
—North Carolina

Ten years ago I was homeless, strung out on drugs and addicted to alcohol. I cannot even begin to tell you how much you have helped me! By God’s grace my life is now so different that I have to pinch myself. I can never thank you enough!—Mississippi

Thank you for standing up and giving us the real truth. Through you God has helped so many minds and hurts by learning that it is ALL

about Jesus Christ and him ALONE!  
—Kentucky

For many years, my husband and I have read every sentence of the mailings we receive from you, and we are always blessed, encouraged and educated by your writings. But the latest issue of Plain Truth (and the accompanying Partner letter) is the best issue ever! Not only are all of the articles right on the money for concerns we and our family, friends and neighbors have, but the wording of all articles makes us even more eager than normal to hand on our copies to them.

If there ever is a long-term solution to the problems on our dying earth and in our dying civilizations, your work will rank at the very top of helping us all heal. Please thank everyone who endeavors in these efforts with you all.—Idaho

Thanks be to CWR/PTM for bringing the good news of God to so many! May we all give much thanks to the Lord for his unmeasurable grace and love that he restores upon the world despite all its evil. May God continue to bless your work around the world in his service.—Maryland

Thanks for being a “friend” to me and so many others, stripping away many false perspectives of God

learned from religious traditions. God has used your work to enlighten many hearts with the vision you have painted of a loving, merciful God full of grace and acceptance for ALL his children. I feel so thankful to be part of this ministry.—Arizona

I just need to say thank you for showing me the freedom and love of God. I grew up in church and chose to attend Christian School. All my life I literally feared God, which lead to an anxiety disorder as a child and continued into adulthood. It all boiled down to feeling like God was disappointed in me.

School and church taught me that I was never good enough for God and I learned to follow him for fear of hell. A relationship with Him seemed forced and unattainable. My anxiety came to a head three years ago and I was incapacitated by fear and dread. It boiled down to me being so scared of death and God.

Thank God, through CWR/PTM the teachings of the church that instilled such fear have been transformed. I still feel very angry about the “religion” that held me captive for so long. I am so thankful for the continued encouragement and reminders that I do not have to be in bondage to fear. —Email

Thank God for your articles. They are getting meatier and stronger

every month. I continue to pray for God's inspiration on all of you who are involved in this ministry. I am thankful that I can be a part of this great work.—Alabama

There are many charities out there who seem to need help. It seems like I give to one and suddenly I receive requests from ten more out of nowhere.

I believe at this time CWR/PTM is the most truthful and sincere. I

thank you so much for all your help.—Michigan

I'm ever so grateful for CWR/PTM. Your material keeps me grounded in Jesus and the Bible. —Louisiana

Thank you so much for the truth of Jesus that you share with all who will listen and accept! I love your work! —Colorado

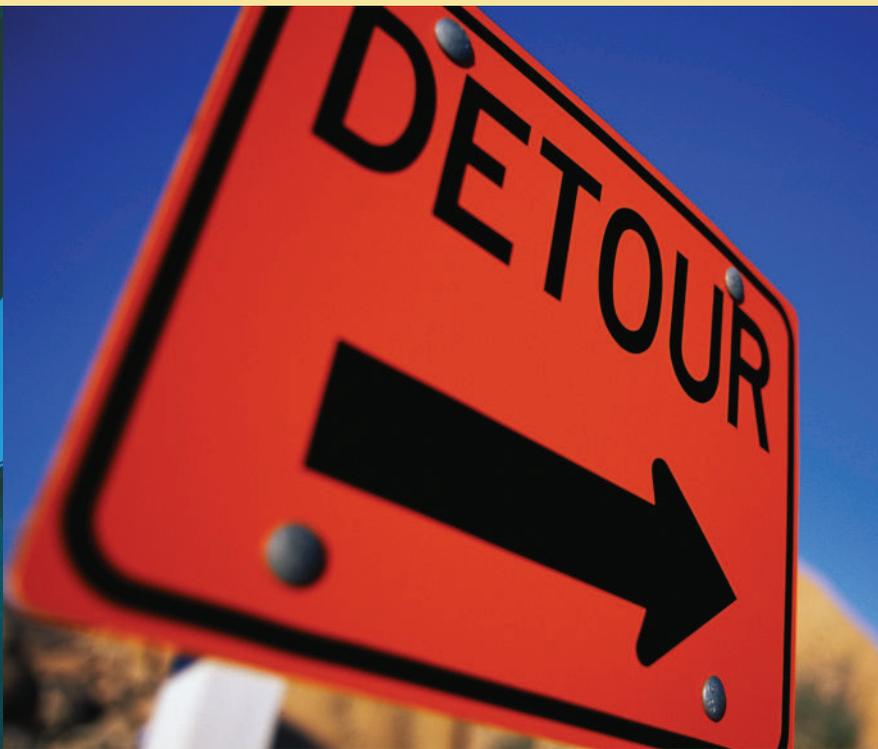
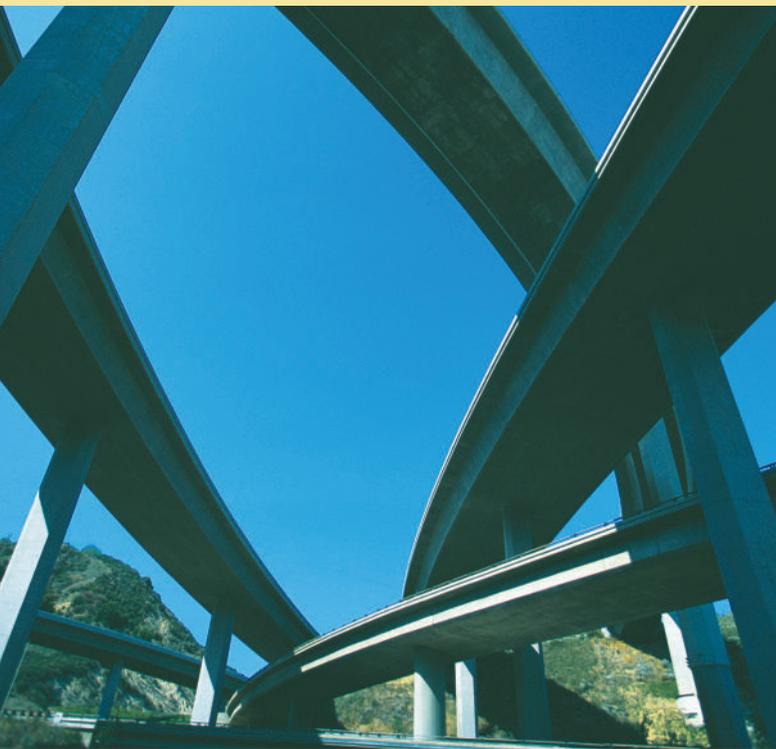
I enjoy reading all your material.

It's amazing how much I've learned from reading your magazines. —Georgia

I'm so thankful to God for leading me from legalism to his divine eternal grace through Plain Truth Ministries. —California

Thanks so much for all you do. We learn and grow daily from the much-needed teaching you generously provide. —Washington

## Your new life in Christ...



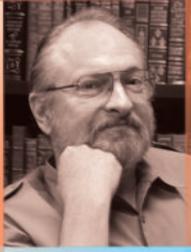
**should be your onramp to freedom, not a detour into legalism.**

We're Plain Truth Ministries and we take that name seriously. We don't have all the answers, but we know the direction. We'll help you assess the road ahead, pointing out the potholes. We'll do our best to help you out of a spiritual ditch—should you find yourself in one.

**TRUTH**  
—in an—  
**Uncertain World**

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## The Band

**M**y friend Dave's well-worn hollow-body guitar had been electric—until his brother gutted it. But it was nevertheless a guitar. Being 15 and not too discerning, I traded for it with my old electric train, which no longer interested me. A few months and lots of practice later, three high school buddies and I formed a band. After a few weeks of practice, we began playing for dances.

We were the quintessential mid-60s garage band. There followed nearly two intoxicating years of gigs, rehearsals, stagecraft, warnings from police to keep our volume down, creative conflicts, setting up and taking down of equipment and some shabby musical arranging—all the while keeping up with school and other activities.

Then came graduation, and we went our various ways—to college, work or the service. At least one band mate (Otis) opted to stay in the game. He dove headlong into the local band scene. The next year when I came home from college on spring break, he had become an accomplished musician but had gone full psychedelic. I recall him declaring, “Anything that wants to can grow on me!”

Not long after that, during his physical exam for the draft, he suffered a genuine cardiac event from the sheer level of exotic substances in his system. Someone reported him flashing a grinning thumbs up as he was trundled away on a gurney to the ER. Of course he was rejected from the service and free to continue his reckless ways. Yet just a couple of years later Otis turned a sudden 180, sold all his instruments and returned to his Mormon roots. As far as I know, he is a dedicated church and family man to this day.

I'm sure his parents applauded his decision. Others, myself included, wondered if his return to such an authoritarian institution amounted to more bondage than the addictions/excesses of his psychedelic days.

But I should talk. My own high school years had been no shining example of virtue

(although somehow I managed to graduate with honors). After all, I had the use of a car, lots of freedom, girlfriends, the rush of being a rocker on a stage and a few bucks in my pocket. What more could a 17-year old guy want? I was not exactly looking forward to four years of incarceration at a strict religious college, but I applied because I believed it was “the right thing to do.” (Once I settled in, I actually enjoyed my college years, learning a profession and meeting a girl I'd later marry.)

Years afterward I would understand that Otis and I had done just about the same thing. Whether from a sense of guilt, obligation or fear, we had dutifully traded a freewheeling lifestyle for the guardianship of religion.

Many of us go through times of freedom, possibly followed by seasons of restraint after we abused the freedom. I think those times of restraint might be similar to something the Apostle Paul discussed in his letter to the Galatians—regarding the difference between the Old Testament law and faith in Christ. *“Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith”* (Galatians 3:23-24).

Because this passage is poorly translated in some versions, some folks mistakenly believe that Old Testament law leads us to Christ. Some even advocate preaching the Law as sort of a foundation in order to terrorize people into repentance. This is pointless! Christ himself is the only true foundation and God draws us to him (John 6:44). About the only thing the law and religious regulations can maybe do is to help keep us from destroying ourselves until such time as we accept Christ's invitation into genuine freedom.

The final verse in that passage nails Paul's concept: *“Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian”* (Galatians 3:25). □

—Monte Wolverton



## Quotes & Connections



So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law... For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love."

—Apostle Paul, Galatians 5:1, 13 (NLT)

"To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."—Nelson Mandela

"Freedom ends when Jesus Himself is lost to view, when He cannot get a hearing through the ecclesiastical setup, when He is ignored in favor of legalizing, moralizing, philosophizing, and so we erect new temples to an unknown god."—Brennan Manning, *The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus*

"Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought."—Pope John Paul II

"Most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility." —Sigmund Freud

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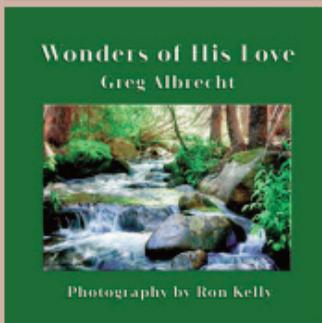
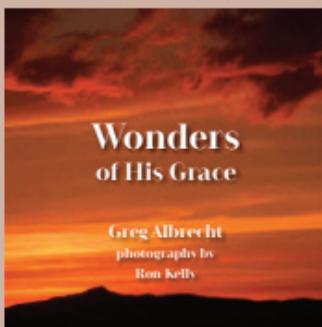
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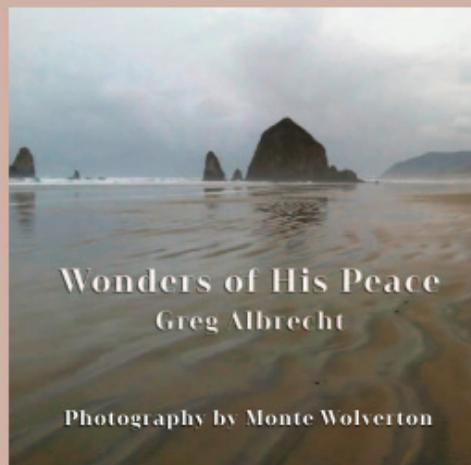
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