

**What People Are Saying About Bradley Jersak and
*A More Christlike Word...***

A brilliant and compelling journey into reading Scripture as expounded by Christ himself on the road to Emmaus, gently exposing and correcting the weaknesses of many modern presuppositions and opening us up to the more wonderful mystery of a loving God. *A More Christlike Word* will be sure to touch the hearts of many.

—Fr. John Behr

Regius Chair of Humanity, University of Aberdeen, Scotland

Bradley Jersak has spent a lifetime immersed in the Scriptures. And now, with *A More Christlike Word*, he shares with us his hard-won insights on how to interpret the Scriptures as Christ himself did on the Emmaus road that first Easter. Of the many recent books on biblical interpretation, I find *A More Christlike Word* to be the most thorough and comprehensive. It is a gift!

—Brian Zahnd

Lead pastor, Word of Life Church, St. Joseph, MO
Author, *When Everything's on Fire*

Brad Jersak is a mapmaker, and *A More Christlike Word: Reading Scripture the Emmaus Way* is an atlas of sorts, a trusty guide for the journey ahead. This is a necessary book for our time, when so many people are experiencing crises of faith. For anyone who loves the triune God but has found the Bible problematic, this book feels like utter redemption. *A More Christlike Word* is an invitation to engage the written word through the living Word.

—Felicia Murrell

Author, *Truth Encounters*

For many of us who are conflicted between our deep respect for the Bible and legitimate questions which that esteem requires we address, Bradley Jersak has gifted us with this welcome companion, educating the mind and freeing the heart to harmonize Scripture with the revelation of God we see in Jesus the Messiah.

—Paul Young

Author, *The Shack, Cross Roads, Eve, and Lies We Believe About God*
Coauthor, with Bradley Jersak, *The Pastor: A Crisis*

Brad Jersak is a gifted storyteller, a wise scholar, a careful thinker and reader, and a compassionate human being. He brings these and other assets to the task of helping us rediscover the Bible. I dare to hope that every seminarian will be assigned this book as required reading and that Christians of all denominations and callings will let Brad Jersak reintroduce them to the Bible, a book he knows and loves contagiously.

—Brian D. McLaren

Author, *Faith After Doubt*

Memoricide is one of the besetting illnesses of our ethos, and a casualty of such an illness is a one-dimensional, literal-grammatical approach to biblical exegesis. *A More Christlike Word: Reading Scripture the Emmaus Way* is a portal into a more layered and classical exegetical tradition and, as such, both a way-finder to the fullness of the faith journey and an antidote for memoricide.

—Ron Dart

University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, Canada

Have you ever felt that seemingly “toxic” texts in the Bible suffocate rather than strengthen faith? If so, then this book will help you find a way to hear the life-giving Word speaking through Scripture—even the tough parts. Bradley Jersak faces difficult passages head-on with honest, provocative, wise, and stimulating insights. Here is an accessible and informed guide to Christ-centered biblical interpretation.

—Rev. Dr. Robin Parry

Author, *The Evangelical Universalist* and *The Biblical Cosmos*

If you find the Bible heavy lifting rather than finding yourself carried by Jesus, the incarnate Word himself, and his indescribably good gospel of love, *A More Christlike Word* is for you. It will invite you to move from simply reading verses through an unexamined lens to always listening for the revelation of Christ, by Christ, who reveals what is true concerning the relentless, renewing love of God our Father, and, thus, what is true about us as his beloved ones.

—Dr. Cherith Fee Nordling
Sessional Lecturer, Regent College, Vancouver
Author, *Knowing God by Name*

Brad Jersak is passionate about reclaiming the Bible. Don't for a moment take that to mean that he's doubling down on the status quo. Instead, he's boldly inviting us to trade in the more recent glasses that have told us what the Bible means for a much earlier prescription—lenses that dare us to see the Bible through the image of Jesus stamped on our hearts and woven through its pages. Then, watch it come to life!

—Gary Best
Former National Director, Vineyard Canada
Author, *Where Joy Is Found*

In Bradley Jersak's *A More Christlike Word*, we see the author in *status viatoris*, on the way out of the idolatry that misplaced the living Word for the gift of Scripture, revealing the presence of the kingdom, precisely because the light of Christ illuminates the biblical text, turning our darkness and judgment to light and mercy, and our spiritual pride to the stance of humility through which the Holy Spirit makes all things new.

—David Goa
Founder, The Chester Ronning Centre for the Study
of Religion and Public Life
Augustana Campus, University of Alberta, Canada

What kind of book is the Bible? How should we read and interpret the Bible? How should we tell the Bible's story with our words and our lives? These are the questions at the heart of this marvelous book by Dr. Brad Jersak. In an era when each person, or each camp, views their own positions as thoroughly "biblical" and judges anyone who dissents as "unbiblical," *A More Christlike Word* serves as a powerful antidote to this hermeneutical disease. May God bless this wonderful book and help us all to read the Holy Bible in a more Christlike way.

—Joe Beach

Pastor, Amazing Grace Church, Denver, CO

Author, *Ordinary Church: A Loving and Longing Look*

A More Christlike Word is an extraordinarily fresh, yet remarkably ancient, vision of Holy Scripture. By placing the Bible in its rightful context of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, Bradley Jersak gives space to all its disparate voices—from the legalists to the mystics, from the priests to the common folks, from the prophets to the apostles. Here is an epic story that involves us all, and we are invited to follow Jesus as our Rabbi in community with the hungry. Brilliant, readable, visionary!

—C. Baxter Kruger, Ph.D.

Author, *The Shack Revisited* and *Patmos*

I can think of no more urgent task for the North American church than to rediscover her sacred scriptures via the "Emmaus Way"—that is, accompanied by the illuminating person and counsel of the living, risen Christ. Brad Jersak's *A More Christlike Word* mercifully wrestles the scriptures from the gray, gripping fingers of modernity's literalists and inerrantists and places them back in the supple hands of Jesus.

—Steve Bell

Singer-songwriter

For years, I have been enriched by reading Brad Jersak’s books. With *A More Christlike Word*, more than ever before, I have been both challenged and thrilled. Whether by digging deeply into issues like the fallacy of inerrancy, demonstrating how to read Scripture at multiple levels, or affirming the centrality of the gospel as the canon of our faith, Brad has shown that Christ—the Word—is the only sure guide for rightly reading the entire Bible.

—Steve Stewart
Founder and President, Impact Nations

Brad Jersak is a trustworthy, fair, good-natured, and generous guide who succeeds in presenting a high view of both Christ and Scripture, even if this means dethroning the latter from the right hand of the Father. If you’ve ever wanted to have an easygoing yet in-depth conversation with Brad Jersak about Christotelic hermeneutics over a beer (and who hasn’t?), reading *A More Christlike Word* is about as close as it gets.

—Dr. Andrew Klager
Director, Institute for Religion, Peace and Justice

When Jesus spoke with Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration, he gave us a visual icon for a new hermeneutic: Jesus as schooling the Law and the Prophets. Brad Jersak is urging us toward this ancient way of reading Scripture, in which Jesus is our true guide and interpreter. Laying aside unhelpful labels, such as “progressive” and “fundamentalist,” Brad focuses on how Jesus actually opened Scriptures to us—and invites us to an Emmaus road experience ourselves.

—Julie Canlis
Author, *A Theology of the Ordinary*

Christians are people of the Scriptures. But what does that mean for those who've undergone "deconstruction"? What can we honestly still believe about these texts? How can we read them? Can we receive them as a gift? In *A More Christlike Word*, Bradley Jersak takes these questions seriously, handling them carefully and humbly. But he also answers them confidently, persuaded that because God is like Jesus, the Scriptures not only bear witness to the truth but also transfigure us into his likeness.

—Chris E. W. Green

Professor of Public Theology, Southeastern University

Author, *Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness, and Scripture*

The Bible is a troubling, mesmerizing library, at turns moving, brutal, complicated, and comforting. And almost no one in our time knows how to read it. Enter the first Christians. In *A More Christlike Word*, Bradley Jersak introduces us to their "Emmaus Way," a Jesus-directed predisposition that unveils the Bible's mysteries, helping us to smell the aroma, taste the goodness, hear the gladness, see the glory, and touch the wounds of the human God in every book of the Scriptures.

—Fr. Kenneth Tanner

Pastor, Church of the Holy Redeemer, Rochester Hills, MI

BRADLEY JERSAK



A MORE
Christlike
WORD

READING SCRIPTURE

THE EMMAUS WAY



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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The forms *LORD* and *GOD* (in small caps) in Bible quotations represent the Hebrew name for God *Yahweh*, while *Lord* and *God* normally represent the name *Adonai*, in accordance with the Bible version used.

Bible reference abbreviations are taken from *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed., SBL (Society of Biblical Literature) Press, 2014, <https://www.nashotah.edu/sites/default/files/Biblical%20Abbreviations.pdf>.

Unless otherwise noted, all emphases throughout this book, including quotations from the Bible and reference works, are by the author.

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For—and, in many ways, from—
my teacher
Fr. John Behr

and our Open Table “Gospel of John” panel:
John MacMurray
Cherith Fee Nordling
Kenneth Tanner
Paul Young
Jonathan Parker

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CHAPTER 1

HE GREW A BEARD!



“It is Christ himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to him.”⁸
—C. S. Lewis

“What John’s prologue says of John the Baptist, we can say about the Bible: ‘There was a book sent from God that we call the Bible. The Bible came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. The Bible itself is not the light; it came only as a witness to the light.’ This is not a low view of Scripture but a high view of Christ.”⁹
—Brian Zahnd

The Word of God is inspired, inerrant, and infallible. And when he was about eighteen years old, he grew a beard. That reliable one-liner triggers double takes and snickers whenever I say it. It might even be original to me.

8. C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume 3: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy, 1950–1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (HarperOne, 2007), 246.

9. Brian Zahnd, email message to author, May 10, 2021. Referring to Brian Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2017), 29–30.

But I'm not just trying to be clever. I'm challenging a cherished assumption—namely, the way my Evangelical heritage habitually and primarily referred to the Bible as “the Word of God.”

I adopted this habit very young. As a boy of six, growing up in Manitoba, Canada, I was already listening to *Back to the Bible*, broadcast on CJRB Radio, every night as I settled down to sleep. Their opening song (as best I remember it) exhorted me,

Back to the Bible, back to the Bible, back to the Word of God.
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
the everlasting Word of God.

The everlasting Word of God?

See the issue? Yes, there is an eternal Word of God. But in his Gospel, the apostle John teaches us that this eternal Word did not become a collection of stone tablets, papyrus scrolls, or leather-bound books. Rather, the Word who created sandstone, grass reeds, and cowhide *became flesh*. And when he was twelve years old, or thereabouts, the divine Word hit puberty. The Word is a person. The confusion or conflation of inspired texts with the eternal Son of God is deeply problematic, especially when the Bible *displaces* Christ as the “Word of God” and “Scripture alone” becomes our “sole and final authority” instead of him.

The Baptist tradition in which I was raised used to distinguish the living Word of God (Jesus) from the written word of God (the Bible), but in conversation, the default referent for “the Word” was always Scripture. “Brothers and sisters, what does the Word say?” We didn’t mean, “What does Christ say?” We meant, “Can you show me a Bible verse?”

That said, the fuzzy identification of the Word of God as both Jesus Christ and my “Holy Bible” was natural for me. That’s because the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—comprised the main stage on which I “met Jesus” and “heard him speak.” Please forgive the proliferation of scare quotes. Trust that they indicate the lingo I was immersed in rather than cynicism about inspired Scripture. I am deeply grateful for, and have no regrets at all about, that early introduction to my favorite book. We

Baptists claimed to have a “high view” of Scripture. I still do. Higher today than ever, I suspect, even if I’ve demoted it from God’s throne in my mind.

But please hear me: I am *not* denying that the Bible is “the word of God” in some real sense. Yes, it is a *witness* to the Word, and it contains the *promises* of God. In John 6, Jesus even suggests that to *chew* on the Scriptures is to *chew* on his flesh and to *eat* him, the living Bread (the manna) who descends from heaven!

Indeed, the Scriptures might even be regarded as an *appearance of Christ the Word*, bearing with the wounds of his passion across its pages:

...we read of the rejection and despoiling of the anointed life, a type of crucifixion of the divine Word. It is often done in the name of God in biblical narrative as if by us in our own time. Christ’s passion runs like a deep red river through the whole of the Bible, from beginning to end. But the light of Christ is present as well, illuminating human passions and calling us to turn around to self-giving love and the ending of enmity.¹⁰

Still, in the ultimate sense, I contend that Christ alone is the eternal Word of the triune God and, as such, uniquely reveals his Father and unveils the true meaning of the Scriptures as pointing to him.

“BACK TO THE BIBLE, BACK TO THE WORD OF GOD”

Let the first lisplings utter Christ, let earliest childhood be formed by the Gospels of Him whom I would wish particularly presented in such a way that children also might love Him.¹¹

I have cherished the Scriptures ever since I obtained my first copy, a genuine imitation-leather King James Version (red-letter edition) that I earned by memorizing the books of the Bible in order and reciting my first

10. David J. Goa and Dittmar Mündel, “The Bible and the Land of Shades: Divine Justice and How We Read the Bible,” in *Reading the Bible as Life-giving Word*, Occasional Papers of the Chester Ronning Centre II (Camrose: AB: The Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life, 2013), 33.

11. Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraclesis, Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus*, 3rd ed., ed. John C. Olin (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), 107.

thirty Bible verses from memory—while still only a second-grade graduate. My dad used to tease me for calling what I did “rememorizing.” (These days, that’s exactly what I need to do.) I would sing to myself from Psalm 119, “Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee.”¹² Those prerequisites for Bible ownership were self-imposed. Dad told me he’d get me a copy regardless, but I insisted on crossing some imagined threshold that would reflect the honor of owning a Bible when so many people did not have that opportunity. I sensed a gravity about handling Scripture. I still do.

By the beginning of grade three, I had scoured the entire book of Acts, full of wonder at the apostles’ miracles and courage—and wondering why our church didn’t look much like what I saw there. Then I went on to read and highlight every verse Dad had marked in his *Pocket New Testament* and *Scofield Study Bible*.

During that time, I also convinced my pastor to baptize me (significantly underage for that church culture). I recall, immediately after my baptism, receiving a distinct awareness of the Spirit’s illumination. The sense of “I get this” surprised me whenever I read. No one suggested this would happen or connected those dots for me. To this day, I’m convinced of the reality of inspiration and illumination because I have experienced it profoundly. At that time, I especially loved the words of Jesus, printed in red letters. I still do, and more than ever.

It must have been during middle school that I first read *The Living Bible* in its entirety (*The Way* edition that the “Jesus people” so loved). It took me a *long* time to read it all, so I was impressed with my Babička, my dad’s mom, who used to read the entire Bible every year, even into her nineties. After a couple times through, I found it more helpful for me to stay in one chapter or book for months on end, so I haven’t done a complete annual reading for a long time. But I did have that “read your Bible, pray every day” conviction on into high school and, for a while, I practiced reading one psalm and one chapter of Proverbs between sets of push-ups and sit-ups each night before bed.

For me, the “Word of God” was not *only* the Bible that I read. It included the words of God I heard from the pulpit and felt compelled to preach. Not

12. Verse 11, paraphrase.

long after my baptism, my family moved to Killarney, Manitoba, where, as an elementary student, I composed and preached my first sermon. My key text was Matthew 6:33—the first verse I had memorized in the King James Version: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” In that initial homily, I connected this promise of Jesus with the experience of the boy-king Solomon. Having been offered by God anything he wanted—wealth, power, or fame—Solomon chose God’s wisdom (literally, “a hearing heart”).¹³ The sermon went well, I thought. And now, I was not merely a young fundamentalist mimicking his parents’ faith. I truly felt called.

On the other hand, with my adolescent insecurities, I confess to an ego element and performance-orientation in my study of Scripture. For example, Nancy MacMillan and I were archrival “sword drill” champs at Bible camp and Sunday school. If you aren’t familiar with this competition, a sword drill was a contest where we would all hold our Bibles above our heads, the Bible-master would speak out a reference (“John 3:16”), we would repeat it, and then s/he would say, “Charge!” We’d all pull our Bibles down and furiously race to find the verse. The first to stand up and read the verse out loud would get a point. To be champ usually meant finding the verse in five to seven seconds. It felt satisfying if I could edge out Magnificent MacMillan to win the weekly prize. Heady stuff, that.

“THE WORD OF OUR GOD SHALL STAND FOREVER”

I entered Bible college with a brand-new *Ryrie Study Bible*, and this too would become a point of pride. I was always toting it along everywhere I went (hey girls, did you notice?) so that, once I’d completed every Bible and theology course available, my copy of the “Good Book” had notations on every page and was MacGyvered together by duct tape.

By the time I’d earned my bachelor’s and master’s degrees in biblical studies, I’m not sure that I’d ever been further from the actual *Word*. Christ was relegated to the back seat in my academic pursuit of the Book.

Teachers such as Carl Hinderager, my Gospels teacher and mentor, could see through the facade. He did his best to guide me forward, but character comes slow for me. Still does. Happily, the apostle was right:

13. See 1 Kings 3:5–15.

you can't sow in the Spirit and not reap.¹⁴ The six hours a week that Carl gave me through three years as his student marker would later bear fruit in renewing my childhood love for Jesus and in my eventual call to ministry.

For over half a decade, while earning my degrees, every time I drove through the entrance of that Bible college, I was greeted by its motto, which boasted the promise of Isaiah in these words: "...the word of our God shall stand forever."¹⁵

Although Isaiah was likely referring to the reliability of God's covenant promises, as in "you have my word," we had come to recognize "God's word" as referring to the Bible—*inspired, infallible, and inerrant*. Indeed, these three *I*-words were, for us, the supreme test of orthodoxy. In the faith statements of our "Bible-believing" colleges, in our local "Bible fellowships" and denominations, and at the "Bible camps" where I served, the Evangelical Bible was embedded in official faith statements as "*the Word of God, our final authority for faith and practice.*"

I bought in completely. I loved the certitude of "verbal plenary inspiration." I felt secure knowing that "every word of Scripture is true in all that it affirms" (in the alleged "original autographs"). Any contradictions were explained away as transcription errors. But the pristine originals were flawless. I would have proudly signed off on "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy."¹⁶ We'll come back to that later.

Sure, we knew that Christ is also the living Word of God as described in the prologue of John's Gospel. But then, when I memorized the book of Hebrews' description of the "word of God," I read that as "the Bible."

¹²*The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* (Heb 4:12 KJV)

I was taught and believed that this verse referred to sacred Scripture. The Word = the Bible. I didn't notice that the verse following says, "Neither

14. See Galatians 6:8.

15. See Isaiah 40:8.

16. "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, <https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI-1978-11-07.pdf>.

is there any creature that is not manifest in *his* sight” (Heb 4:13 KJV), or that the next says, “Seeing then that we have a *great high priest*” (Heb 4:14 KJV). And really, how could I hope to connect those dots when the translators so often inserted a bold, intrusive subtitle between verse 12 and the rest of the chapter? My edition of the Bible deliberately segmented “the word of God” from the person of Christ, and I failed to notice.

You see my point: I have always LOVED the Bible, and I have always LOVED Jesus. And I still do. But in prioritizing *study* of the Bible (“to show myself approved unto God”¹⁷) ahead of hearing and following Christ the Word—by making my interpretation of the Good Book my final authority—I learned how to read without intimacy. I could dissect the Bible without illumination. And I most definitely *felt* the absence of the Holy Spirit in my reading as keenly as I had felt the Spirit’s presence as a child. I read with a veil over my heart, and in the infrequent pauses between being “wise in my own eyes,”¹⁸ I’m embarrassed to say I absolutely knew it.

“I WANT TO KNOW YOU”

When I was studying for my first master’s degree in the late 1980s, masquerading the poverty of my faith behind Bible studies and theological textbooks was no longer working for me. The dispensational theology I was immersed in while I was growing up, and the Calvinism I had embraced through my first years at seminary, had stifled me spiritually. Now, unable to find satisfactory answers to my growing questions from my advanced studies, I found my faith drifting even further away from Jesus. My mother noticed the dysfunction and repeatedly urged me, “Bradley, you must stay open.” It was hard because those theological systems promised certitude while actively denying that Christ speaks today and creating suspicion about anything related to the Holy Spirit. Evangelical rationalism cut me off from the contemplative path, repeatedly labeling those who claimed to hear the voice of God as insane, demonized, or New Agers.

But I had bottomed out. I had to admit to myself that I didn’t “know God.” I knew for sure that the apostle Peter’s description of “joy unspeakable” (1 Pet 1:8) in the Holy Spirit was altogether foreign to me.

17. See 2 Timothy 2:15.

18. See 2 Corinthians 3:15; Proverbs 3:7.

In that context, I believe *Abba*, my heavenly Father, slipped me a set of earnest prayers he fully intended to answer. I was studying Exodus 33, jealous of Moses's face-to-face communion with God in the tent of meeting. I longed for God to say he was pleased with me as he had said to Moses, because "I know you by name." I could no longer relate to such a living connection, but the story stirred up a desire for something more, something real.

On the heels of the golden calf incident, Yahweh appears to throw up his hands—even after the Lord had redeemed the Israelites from slavery, they remained incorrigible. God tells Moses he's pretty much done with them. He'll send them on with an angel because Yahweh's own presence would be too dangerous for such a defiant lot. He's ready to pack up with Moses and go start their brand-new nation. Alarmed, Moses boldly makes three urgent demands:

1. *Teach me your ways.*
2. *I won't take one more step without you.*
3. *Show me your glory.*¹⁹

This is exactly what God was teasing out of Moses—a willing partner and intercessor. More than that, God wanted a *friend*. God responded to all three requests in what turned into a historic breakthrough of God's self-disclosure.

I wanted that kind of encounter—a real and living connection. More than anything. And yet I experienced a deep conviction that Jesus was speaking to me when he castigated his opponents:

³⁹*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; [YES, I HAVE DONE THIS!]*

³⁸*You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent.*

³⁷*And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. [NO, I HADN'T!] (John 5:37–39 NASB, verses in reverse order)*

19. See Exodus 33:12–18.

By now I had married Eden (1986), finished my MA (1988), and discovered that employment in the academic world was slim pickings. Despite reservations about pastoral ministry, I accepted a call to Bethel Mennonite Church (Eden's home congregation) in southwestern British Columbia, where I quickly fell in love with frontline youth, young adult, and community outreach. My faith was revitalized, and I began praying Moses's prayers religiously and earnestly: "Show me your ways; no further without you; let me see your glory!"

And I began to constantly pray these texts from Psalm 27 and Ephesians 1, personalizing them:

⁴One thing I ask from the LORD,

 this only do I seek:...

to gaze on the beauty of the LORD....

⁸My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"

 Your face, LORD, I will seek.

⁹Do not hide your face from me....

¹³I remain confident of this:

 I will see the goodness of the LORD

 in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the LORD;

 be strong and take heart

 and wait for the LORD.

(Ps 27:4, 8–9, 13–14 NIV)

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give ME the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that I may know him better. I pray that the eyes of MY heart may be enlightened in order that I may know the hope to which he has called ME. (Eph 1)²⁰

20. See Ephesians 1:17–18 (NIV).

Selfish prayers. Naïve. Bold. Demanding...even importunate, but a quality in prayer commended by Christ himself! I saw in Abraham, Moses, and David a certain presumption in prayer that God regards as a sign of trust, faith, and friendship. That was my goal.

Did God answer my prayer? Thirty years later, the jury is out. There's some debate about whether I became a heretic or a prophet. Either is too grandiose. I'd just like to become God's friend, since he's always been mine, despite me.

Good news: the verdict doesn't belong to a jury anyway. Christ alone knows what I am. I can't even judge for myself. In the end, he'll decide. And I'm good with that. But I know this: *I've met the Word of God, and he's far more than a book.* I've come to trust in his mercy *absolutely*, and, with the old chorus riffing off Psalm 89:1,

I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever.

With my mouth, will I make known,

Great is thy faithfulness!