

# Brown's Big Bang

☒ Before there was *The Da Vinci Code*, there was *Angels & Demons*. This might come as a surprise to some who thought Dan Brown's best-selling novel turned 2006's blockbuster movie was the first to center around Robert Langdon, a fictional Harvard professor of religious symbology.

In fact, *Angels & Demons* was written in 2000 and preceded *The Da Vinci Code* by three years. But Ron Howard—who returns to direct the latest intellectual thriller—decided to tackle the two projects in reverse order, presumably because of *The Da Vinci Code*'s more scintillating story line. He also retained Tom Hanks' services as Langdon for this prequel turned sequel that hit theatres this past weekend.

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# Flight Risk

☒ As I sit in the Tulsa International Airport waiting for my flight to Houston, I just realized how oxymoronic my life is when it comes to travel. I love going places, especially cities and states that I've never visited. That number is quickly decreasing yet I still find myself longing to go.

I love the feeling of stepping out of baggage claim and wandering out for a new adventure. I thoroughly enjoy experiencing fresh perspectives through the culture of a different part of the country and, on rare occasions, different parts of the world.

But here's the oxymoronic part. I hate just about everything it takes to get from point A to point B. There is absolutely

nothing endearing about parking my car; waiting for the shuttle driver to arrive; deliberating the etiquette of tipping said shuttle driver; waiting in line to get a boarding pass (hoping the "easy" check-in machine can read my credit card); standing in line for security; dumping all of my belongings (shoes included) on to a conveyer belt; walking through a screening machine (praying it doesn't beep); hustling to the terminal only to find that the flight has been delayed; waiting for said flight to finally arrive; standing in line to get on the plane; wading through the congested aisle while looking for that last empty overhead bin; squeezing into a seat that seems to shrink with each trip; praying I don't get stuck sitting next to that one person who has never flown before and has major anxiety attacks throughout the entire trip; wading through the congested aisle while de-boarding the plane; hustling to the connecting flight that is boarding precariously close to the previous flight and going through the whole routine again until finally arriving at that glorious destination that was surely worth the trouble.

Then there's something I like to call "flight risk" (pun intended). No matter how hard I try to forget about it; there is always the chance that something could go wrong. Whether it be a terrorist attack or an untimely encounter with a flock of birds taking to the so-called "friendly skies", it isn't always danger-free. And of course, there's always those inevitable pockets of stomach-turning turbulence.

My forays into air travel kind of remind me of my relationship with Christ. I love the benefits of my salvation. I deeply appreciate the hope that I have thanks to the great sacrifice He made on the cross. I gladly accept the blessings and promises of God's Word. I wait longingly for Jesus' return when I will take that last flight to an eternity in heaven.

But just like I deplore the hassles of flying, I often find myself frustrated with, and sometimes even resistant to, the process that I must go through as a follower of Christ. Finding time to pray and read the Bible is a daily challenge. Disciplining myself to fast and deny myself life's simple pleasures for the sake of His call is a near impossibility. Focusing on relationships in a meaningful, Christ-like manner is a constant struggle. And being patient in waiting for dreams to be fulfilled and prayers to be answered is a painstaking process that drives me to the edge of insanity.

The walk of faith is also full of significant risk. My good friend Kenny Luck wrote about this in a book aptly titled *Risk*. Check it out sometime if you find yourself, like me, struggling with the inherent dangers of the Christian faith.

You see, our spiritual journey is full of trials and tribulations. The Bible often compares it to the process that fine metals like gold and silver go through in order to be purified. Sometimes we deal with persecution from those who don't share our beliefs. For some in other parts of the world persecution is serious business and can result in physical harm, imprisonment or even death. These are all things that we must deal with in order to become the people God called us to be. The risk we take dots a path that leads to great reward both here on earth and in heaven.

Towards the end of his life, Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith (HCSB)."

Paul had a very difficult road and described his journey as a fight, albeit a "good fight." Paul also wrote in Romans 12:12 that we should, "Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer."

He knew that there was something much greater waiting for him beyond this world. He understood that his devotion to the faith would produce a great reward—the “riches of the glory” he referred to in Colossians 1:27 (NASB). Paul also reminds us in 1 Corinthians 2:9 that, “no eye has seen and no ear has heard and what has never come into a man’s heart, is what God has prepared for those who love Him.”

I started this blog sitting in the Tulsa airport. I finished sitting in a room overlooking a beautiful stretch of Pensacola Beach. The trip was definitely worth the trouble. And I’m strangely affirmed by the promise that eternity with our Lord is worth any “flight risk” we as Christians will ever be asked to take.

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## Marie Green Day

☒ Marie Green was an amazing woman. As the wife of a church-planting pastor and the mother of six ministry-minded children, her legacy continues to have a far-reaching impact.

In case you haven’t heard about Marie Green (and I’m assuming that’s probably the case), let me tell you a little bit about her.

Marie was a prayer warrior. She spent countless hours on her knees praying for people in her community, in her nation and in her world. Marie had an incredible passion for missions. Although she never left the country, she was indirectly responsible for evangelizing millions of people in places like China, the Ukraine and throughout Africa, South America and here in the United States.

Of Marie's six children (all named after men and women from the Bible), five went on to become pastors or the spouses of pastors. To this day, her son James has a church in Douglasville, Ga., and her daughter Lois is a pastor's wife in Oklahoma. Marie's son Joe is a former pastor and his two sons Jeff and Randy are big-hearted businessmen who have contributed greatly to ministry causes across the globe. Her daughter Esther is a former pastor's wife.

Perhaps Marie's most notable legacy is tied to her second youngest son David who is one of the wealthiest men in America. He is the only Green sibling not tied directly to traditional church ministry, but his hugely successful business (he started the national Hobby Lobby chain out of his garage and built it into a multi-billion dollar company) has allowed him to give millions of dollars to various ministries and efforts all over the world. David's primary goal is to put appropriately-translated Bibles into as many people's hands as possible-including every single Chinese man, woman and child.

David's son Steve and daughter Darsee are intricately involved at Hobby Lobby while his other son Mart is the founder of a Christian bookstore chain. More recently, Mart has created multiple media companies including Every Tribe Entertainment and Ethnographic Media. He is responsible for the production of the film *End of the Spear* and the documentaries *Beyond the Gates of Splendor* and *Miss HIV*.

Over the past 18 months, Mart has been in the news for another reason. On behalf of the Green family, he donated \$70 million to the debt-riddled Oral Roberts University (ORU) and was named chairman of the board. Since that gift, ORU has found the solid footing it has sought for several years and is healthier than its ever been.

So on Saturday, May 2 at ORU's graduation ceremony, Marie Green will receive a lifetime achievement award from the university. Everywhere David and Mart speak, they inevitably mention their mother and grandmother, giving her credit as their personal inspirations to become generous givers and world-impacting men.

But the reason for my adoration is a little more personal. That's because Marie Green is my grandmother-the mother of my mom Betty Bonham. I didn't get much time with my grandmother. She passed away when I was only four years old. Yet somehow, I remember visiting her and my Grandpa Green in Midland, Texas, not long before her death. She was 72 years old at the time.

My mom was greatly influenced by my grandmother. By the age of 18, she was traveling the country with her sisters. They would sing and preach and lead people to Christ in powerful revival services. My mom later became a pastor for a few years at various churches in central Oklahoma and continued to evangelize after that. My grandmother's legacy continued with my oldest sister Rhonda Dilldine who is the worship leader at Hope Church in Broken Arrow, Okla. My other sister Karla Partridge has been the children's pastor at Hope for over 20 years. Both have been rock solid pillars of leadership and amazing examples to everyone in our church.

I like to think I've turned out pretty good myself. And I owe it all to the legacy of my grandparents-grandparents Bonham

and Green-and both of my parents-Stan and Betty. I have two sons of my own now-Lance Andrew and Cole Avery-and by God's grace I intend to see that legacy continue through them.

You see there was no way to tell back then what great things Marie Green's children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and now even one great-great grandchild (and another one the way) would go on to achieve. It's clear now that her legacy of constant prayer, sacrificial giving and unconditional love has been felt by more than even she could have ever imagined.

My grandmother's faithfulness was greatly blessed. She has an amazing Christian lineage in which every single one of her offspring have gone on to become followers of Jesus and servants of God. It reminds me of these Old Testament words:

"God, You have heard my vows; You have given a heritage to those who fear Your name" (Psalm 61:5, HCSB).

Although that verse was penned by King David, it could have been written by my grandmother who left a heritage that continues today and has spanned the globe reaching countless souls with the Gospel.

Perhaps William James said it best: "The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it."

That's really the message here. No matter where you are at in life or what you think you may or may not have to offer, it's never too late to start a legacy of faithful service to God.

Will your legacy look like Marie Green's? Probably not. But as long as your life is blanketed in prayer, service, love and a passionate pursuit of God, you and those you touch will be blessed for generations to come.

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## **(True) Life in the Fast Lane**

☒ There are sports. And then there's NASCAR.

I really didn't understand that concept until I went to my first NASCAR event back in 2005. I watched stock car racing from time to time and got more interested when I found out my wife (heavily influenced by her dad) was a big fan.

But it took hanging out in the garage area throughout the practice rounds and during qualifying for me to really get it. Hearing 43 finely-tuned speed machines roaring in perfect harmony was a kind of music I'd never heard before.

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## **What's In A Name?**

☒ If you ever run into Lance Berkman, do me a favor. Don't tell him I named my first son after him. As someone I've interviewed three times before and will likely interview again in the near future, it's probably best he doesn't think I'm less like a journalist and more like a crazed, stalker-fan.

The truth is that I really didn't name my son after Lance

Berkman. Sure, he's my favorite player. Sure, he plays on my favorite team (the Houston Astros). Sure, Lance Berkman sounds an awful lot like Lance Bonham, but I promise you, it wasn't altogether intentional.

Of course, if that were the case, I could argue that Lance Berkman is an excellent choice as a namesake. Forget the fact that he's a five-time All-Star and one of the best players in the game. I'm more interested in Berkman's personal integrity and spiritual aptitude. That's the stuff role models are really made of.

My third interview with Berkman took place earlier this month for a pair of Fellowship of Christian (FCA) projects. And while many "jocks" are considered all brawn and no brains, Berkman does a lot to dispel that myth-especially when it comes to Bible theology.

In fact, Berkman plans to finish up his degree at Moody Institute during down time on the road this season. It's something he finds easy to do thanks to a growing desire to understand God's Word.

"The thing about the Bible that's amazing to me and still brings me a sense of awe is how well the principles work when applied to your daily walk," Berkman told me. "People say faith is blind but when you put your faith into practice, you start to understand that it's not. God doesn't expect you to abandon reason. There's so much good, practical advice for living. It's not just for the after-life, but it's for how you can live properly now. You can benefit greatly from the principles the Bible espouses. Every time I read it, it just blows me away how accurate and how well the Bible handles the human experience."

That's some pretty steep wisdom for a guy who's best known in the baseball world for his ability to blast homeruns from both sides of the plate.

Berkman went on to tell me that his favorite Bible verse is John 15:5 which says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (NIV).

"It's my favorite because a lot of people who will say, 'Well, I'm a good person,'" Berkman said. "There's a theology out there that says if the good you do outweighs the bad that you do, that means you're a good person therefore you're in good standing with God. That verse really hits home for me because anything we do that's good apart from the power and the name of Jesus Christ, not that it doesn't count, but from a spiritual standpoint, it's not edifying. It's not worth much. The only way that we can truly have a purpose and an enriching life experience is to do all things in Christ and through the power of Christ. What happens when we're all about doing good works and we're doing that outside of the power of Christ is that we end up getting the glory and the whole point of this deal is that God gets the glory. That verse beautifully illustrates that point."

Ironically, John 15:5 is my favorite verse too. Just kidding. But again, who does this guy think he is? Billy Graham?

In the clubhouse, that actually might be a pretty fair comparison. His fun-loving, gentle nature has allowed him some serious influence amongst teammates. He is a bold advocate for the Baseball Chapel ministry and regularly speaks at Christian family day events before thousands and as the Chapel's player representative before a handful of his peers.

"The key to dealing with people in general is that they have to know that you care about them," Berkman said. "You have to deal with people in gentleness. You have to come along side of them. You can't push them. You can't pull them. You have to walk with them. In order to do that, you've got to demonstrate care for that individual. That's my whole thing. I want my teammates to know that I care about them personally. I care

about what happens with them on and off the field. When you are in that position, you earn the right to speak into their lives. I try to let guys know that I do care about them and consequently I think they'll listen to me when I have something to say."

And on the field, Berkman is a fierce competitor. He wants to win and he's not ashamed to say so. In fact, Berkman believes that his Christian faith implores him to strive for the best.

"If I'm out there, I'm out there to win," he said "Christians have done a disservice to the faith by backing off from that. People respect determination. They respect desire. They respect people that want to be good and be excellent in all areas of their life. If you're claiming to be a Christian and yet you're not working as hard as you could or you're not giving a full effort or you're not competing to win or competing at a high level, people aren't going to take you seriously in other areas. I've always thought Christians should work harder than anybody else."

Yes, I'll admit it. I'm a big fan of Lance Berkman. Yes, that probably had a little something to do with why my son's name is also Lance. I suppose my story could have been a little more comical. After all, I could have named him after my original favorite player (now a coach with Berkman's Astros).

His name? Jose Cruz.

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# Perfect Justice

✘ The concept of justice has always intrigued me. Even more interesting is the way that justice is dispensed throughout the world.

England and Wales practice English law. This system is based on common law that, as defined by Wikipedia, “is determined by judges sitting in courts applying common sense and knowledge of legal precedent to the facts before them.”

In Mexico, criminal defendants are considered guilty until proven innocent. Fortunately for the accused, there is no death penalty in Mexico, or most Latin American countries for that matter.

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## Juror No. 3

✘ I sent a man to prison last month. And it wasn't the first time.

Before I get accused of melodramatic hyperbole here, let me explain.

A couple weeks ago, I was scheduled for jury duty in Tulsa County. This marked the second appearance serving our judicial system in almost exactly 10 years. My previous experience was very traumatic. At the time I was the youngest person on a jury that sentenced a man to prison for about 25 years on two counts of sexual molestation. Without getting into the gory

details, the two victims were his children.

We spent several hours in the deliberation room before all 12 of us could produce a guilty charge. I was the next to last person to change my vote. When I got home that night, I broke down the moment my mom opened the door. The trial shook me in ways I'd never felt before.

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## **“The Truth About Beauty”**

✘ In the superficial worlds of Manhattan and Hollywood, image is everything and fashion sense (or the lack thereof) dictates success and failure. So ironically, it's the Hollywood-produced television show “Ugly Betty”-set within the confines of Manhattan's cutthroat publishing world-that has strangely (and somewhat effectively) tackled the concept of true beauty.

In ABC's hit show (based on the Columbian telenovela “Yo Soy Betty La Fea”), we meet Betty Suarez, a recent college graduate from Queens College (and resident of Queens, NY) who is passionate about the publishing industry. However, several magazines (including those owned by Meade Publications) turn her down-implicitly due to her less than fashionable appearance. Betty (America Ferrera) has an outdated, frumpy style (if you want to call it that) complete with frizzy hair and overstated bangs, bushy eyebrows, outdated glasses and hard-to-miss braces.

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# Praise in the House of Wade

- ✘ Every once in a great while, an athletic performance transcends sports and instantly becomes folklore.

Tiger Woods' fought through a knee injury to capture the 2008 U.S. Open. Last November, New England quarterback Matt Cassel—the previously unheralded backup to Tom Brady—passed for over 400 yards in two consecutive games.

A couple months earlier on September 1st, Stephen Drew of the Arizona Diamondbacks and Adrian Beltre of the Seattle Mariners became the first Major League Baseball players since 1920 to hit for the cycle on the same day. That means they hit a single, a double, a triple and a home run in one game.

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## 24: One Day At A Time

- ✘ Modern terrorism has plagued our world for decades, but it wasn't until Sept. 11, 2001 when domestic terrorism in North America was solidified as a legitimate threat. Ironically, it was just two months later when a groundbreaking television program known as 24 was first introduced.

Over the past seven years, the FOX network has fashioned the lead character of Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) into a figure of iconic proportions. Bauer is an enigmatic anti-terrorist agent who knows no boundaries in his quest to protect the lives of his fellow Americans. This fictional creation has become so beloved in popular culture, "Jack Bauer for President" t-shirts and other memorabilia have pervaded the public square. There are hundreds of fan sites dedicated to Bauer and a Google search of the name yields over 2 million

Internet mentions!

Each season revolves around a single 24-hour period time with the non-stop action taking place in real time. 24's producers even provide a recurring digital clock mechanism (akin to a time bomb) to remind viewers of that fact. The program comes with a built in "Viewer Discretion is Advised" warning due to the pervasive graphic violence that makes 24 one of the most intense shows in television history.

Beyond the theme of terrorism, 24 is full of sub-plots involving the characters' histories and working relationships. But don't be mistaken. At the end of the day, 24 is all about Bauer and his uncanny ability to attract big time trouble with far reaching international repercussions.

In Season 1, Bauer loses his estranged, pregnant wife Teri (Leslie Hope) just as it appeared they might reconcile. In that same season, his daughter Kim (Elisha Cuthbert)-along with her mother-is kidnapped and faces constant danger. In fact, his personal relationships are seemingly always in flux thanks to his demanding job and the perilous situations in which he often finds himself.

Over the course of seven seasons, Bauer has lost his job at the Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) and been reinstated on multiple occasions. He has routinely acted as a rogue agent working against the government's wishes in an effort to get around its cumbersome rules and regulations. In season 7 (which has thus far revealed 12 of its 24 hours), CTU has been dismantled and Bauer is under federal investigation for torture-related crimes.

From the beginning, Bauer has also become a confidante to the Presidents. He has single-handedly saved the country from mass terrorism but lost many close friends in the process, most notably Tony Almeida (Carlos Bernard) who was apparently killed in the line of fire during season 5 only to return

during season 7. Bauer even battled a heroin addiction during season 3 that had developed while infiltrating a powerful Mexican drug cartel.

While Jack Bauer might be a perfect illustration of the anti-hero-or the flawed good guy-you have to go back a few thousand years to find the original. His name was David. This famous Old Testament luminary went from nondescript shepherd to King of Israel in just a few short years (see 1 Sam. 16-31; 2 Sam. 1-24).

David is perhaps most famous for his defeat of the Philistine giant named Goliath, a victory that saved his people, but is also noted for his heroic battles against a lion and a bear while protecting his flock. As King, he was the leader of many great military victories. Even before he was anointed the nation's ruler, he had the ear of influential men including King Saul.

But thanks to his glaring character flaws, his reign was anything but a smooth ride. Like Bauer, David endured many intense family conflicts. His son Absalom rebelled against him and died attempting to overthrow his reign. Some of David's household problems stemmed from his lust for women, an addiction that drove him to sleep with another man's wife-Bathsheba-and send him to the frontline where he would be killed in battle.

David also had power struggles much like the ones displayed in 24. He found himself at odds with his mentor Saul and his popularity as the giant killer eventually undermined the King's authority. Like Bauer, David felt the sting of personal loss when his best friend Jonathan (the son of Saul) died a warrior's death.

Just like Jack Bauer and King David, we all have the ability to do great things. But we are likewise flawed and imperfect and make plenty of bad decisions throughout our lives. Too

often these mistakes keep us from reaching our full potential. If we're not careful, we can squander the talents and abilities that God has given us and exchange them for a life of mediocrity and unfulfilled dreams.

Both of these men have something else in common. They both realized that despite their interpersonal imperfections, there was still a greater cause that was worth fighting for. Bauer is driven by his desire to protect his country and its people from terrorism. David was driven by his desire to serve God and the people of Israel from its enemies.

And the amazing thing is that despite David's countless mess ups, he was still referred to as "a man after God's own heart" (see Acts 13:22). How can that be? Is it possible that God can use people to do big things even after they have made seemingly unforgivable mistakes? If you take David's story to heart, the answer must be a resounding, "Yes!" That's because God is faithful to forgive those who are truly repentant of their sins just as David was (see 2 Samuel 12:13).

When you get off track and start to lose your way, it might take a little longer to get to the place where God intended you to be. But following David's lead by asking for God's forgiveness and then moving forward in His grace will straighten out your path in a hurry. It might still take a while to get there, but you *will* get there nonetheless.