

Amazed and Confused

Heather Zempel (Thomas Nelson)

If you've ever been left hurt and bewildered after earnestly praying, this book will be an eye-opener for you. By exploring the story of Habakkuk, you'll learn how to move from confusion to worship.

The God-First Life

Stovall Weems (Zondervan)

With countless areas of life vying for your attention, how can you uncomplicate your life enough to prioritize a strong relationship with God? Pastor Stovall Weems uses Matthew 6:33 to offer a fresh perspective on what following Christ is all about.

Reclaim Your Soul: Your Journey to Personal Empowerment

Cindy Trimm (Destiny Image)

Cindy Trimm explains how to identify destructive relationships, avoid unhealthy attachments and realize your

potential.

The Auschwitz Escape

Joel C. Rosenberg (Tyndale)

Best-selling author Joel Rosenberg shares the story of Jacob Weisz's beloved Germany after the Nazi regime has taken over through a tale that forges into the life of a Jewish militant determined to undermine Hitler's regime.

Growing Up Duggar: It's All About Relationships

*Jill Duggar, Jinger Duggar,
Jessa Duggar, Jana Duggar (Howard Books)*

The lives of one of America's largest reality TV families jump off the pages of this book, written from the vantage point of the four eldest Duggar daughters. They discuss their faith, their dreams and what it's like to be in a family with 19 children.

The Problem With Being Relevant

It always excites me to see churches on the cutting edge of technology, ones structurally organized for growth and doing everything they can to make their houses user-friendly. This is refreshing to me, because it shows God is presented in the most excellent way.

From the parking lot to the reserved seating for guests, all of the checkpoints of welcome are marked off. The proof is in the growth, from multiple services to multiple sites. Many of these churches definitely have what I call the “relevant factor”!

But are they changing the world? People are coming, so God must be pleased, right? Offering plates are full, so God must be pleased, right? The messages are catchy and visual, so God must be pleased, right?

Looking deeper, you sometimes find conviction is no longer needed because the cross took care of that. You learn grace is preached as separation from the cross instead of an invitation to its transformation. Churches rarely speak of Holy Spirit fire these days because they fear the masses won't like such a vision of freedom. We are, after all, living in a day where services are on a timer and where altar calls are for those who haven't figured it out yet.

Given all this, I'm forced to wonder if being relevant is simply a way to fire the Holy Spirit from His job so things will never get messy. That's much easier than deliverance—because deliverance is never easy, and true discipleship is more than a six-month journey. In a day of celebrity-driven platforms, where pulpit substance is neither needed nor desired and a nonconfrontational message of hope

fills the pulpit, maybe we have realized church is just an experience and not an encounter with God.

Is God pleased? Really?

Beware the Times

We are living in very serious, unprecedented times, where truth is considered hate speech and the Bible is considered out of date. We are living in a day where Christians are told to be quiet lest we offend someone and where “secular Christianity” is the new norm.

The apostle Paul warned Timothy of these days, saying, “Don’t be naive. There are difficult times ahead. As the end approaches, people are going to be self-absorbed, money-hungry, self-promoting, stuck-up, profane, contemptuous of parents, crude, coarse, dog-eat-dog, unbending, slanderers, impulsively wild, savage, cynical, treacherous, ruthless, bloated windbags, addicted to lust, and allergic to God. They’ll make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they’re animals. Stay clear of these people” (2 Tim. 3:1-5, MSG).

With all that’s happening, our only recourse is to reinvent how we do church, right? We must make ourselves more relevant, right?

Maybe the apostle Paul saw this day coming as well when he wrote, “Don’t fool yourself. Don’t think that you can be wise merely by being up-to-date with the times. Be God’s fool—that’s the path to true wisdom. What the world calls smart, God calls stupid. It’s written in Scripture, He exposes the chicanery of the chic. The Master sees through the smoke screens of the know-it-alls” (1 Cor. 3:18-20).

I remember what one spiritual father in my life told me about being relevant. He said, “*Relevant* means ‘connection with the subject at issue.’ If the subject at issue is the Great Commission, given by Jesus to His church, and the church is

connected to that subject, then relevant is still in and will be until He returns. When the church loses the connection to that issue, then the church becomes irrelevant.”

Is it possible for the church to be both relevant and a place of true encounter? I think so! But the church at large is at a crossroads right now—too many have embraced being relevant and have abandoned the critical role of transforming souls into God’s kingdom, which needs to be priority one.

Beware the Flesh

Why would we rob this generation of a genuine encounter with God like the one we had when we first began this amazing journey? Could it be we are in a compassion crisis—that we love people’s acceptance so much we aren’t willing to tell them the truth that would rescue their souls? It’s at the altar of redemption and not at the table of man’s knowledge where man finds freedom.

It’s easier to stand and declare who we are because we have lost sight of who *He is*. It’s easier to say, “Look at me,” because if you say, “Look at God,” people may realize we don’t look much like Him. So we reduce God down to a concept of love and compassion but ignore holiness, righteousness and mercy.

Truly, this should not be.

Our song services arouse emotions and stir hearts like never before in history—but what about God’s Word? Jesus never watered down the gospel—in fact, He turned water into wine!

One morning while praying, I heard the Holy Spirit say to me, “Pat, there’s been a demonic onslaught sent from hell to make Christian leaders believe they must live like the world to win the world.” Our message is no longer clear that sin is sin and that God is “a rewarder of those who diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6, NKJV). We preach tolerance instead of the wages of sin because socially it is received better.

But it's important to heed what my friend, pastor Steve Smothermon, said to me one day. He said, "Tolerance is a belief in nothing." When we preach tolerance without declaring truth, he said, we have set ourselves up to never set a boundary. We also will give an account for not being true to our calling.

Beware the Atmosphere

Please understand me: I believe understanding and love are critical to touching lives—after all, it is God's goodness that leads men to repentance (Rom. 2:4). But when do we give people a chance to repent? In the coffee bar? A small group? An encounter weekend that takes place three times a year? These are all amazing places to grow deep in God, but we are living in a day where twice-a-month churchgoers must experience encounters when they actually come to church or they will be swept away by the lies of the enemy.

I love passionate and alive services that are relevant, and I speak year-round at youth conferences being used by God to literally transform a generation. But I have often wondered if we are dangerously close to looking like a club.

What do I mean? I mean that if we are simply producing services with no conviction—if we are churning out lots of cool atmosphere but don't lead people to transformation—would it not be better to just go to any downtown club in any major city? While I love to be in an atmosphere of excitement, lights, sound and stage like the next person, that doesn't mean we should sacrifice truth for relevance. If we can combine a great atmosphere with a powerful and true encounter, then we will win.

To sacrifice conviction for the thrill of an experience negates our purpose. I often wonder if we are raising up a Saul generation that likes worship more than God's Word because it soothes one's demons. Maybe that's what Jesus meant

when He said, "Worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

What God Can Do

I love it when the Holy Spirit invades a room and we see hundreds or thousands run to the altar without invitation. I always stand in awe that God has the power to interrupt the messenger and do more in seconds than we could accomplish in years. That is why we call our places of worship *sanctuaries*. We must allow the Holy Spirit to move freely and inhabit God's temples.

But don't forget, you and I are temples of the Holy Spirit too (1 Cor. 6:19-20)! God inhabits our lives and makes them His home. He chooses to enter us and produce a life of power, freedom and authority in us. Without a Holy Spirit encounter, we will become dried-up religious institutions.

If we aren't going to lead people to change, we may as well shut the doors. Malachi 1:10 reads, "'Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and I will accept no offering from your hands'" (NIV).

I'm reminded of a picture I saw of a worship service in the Philippines where people stood in knee-deep water praising God in the midst of death and destruction around them. The only relevance for these warriors of Christ was that God was—and is—still in control.

Maybe relevance in God's eyes is about preparing His bride for secret encounters and private glances from a heavenly Father who has been with them in the good and the bad. Could it be more than a superficial presentation—creating an atmosphere where heaven invades earth? Where truth is declared in love? Where the weary are refreshed? Where the lost are found?

My friend Joel Stockstill told me recently, "The day of the

consumer-driven model has run its course, and the day of God-breathed, presence-driven, crying-out-to-God ministries has arrived. God forbid that the heavenly encounters paid for on the cross would be boiled down to a 45-minute run sheet and a service devoid of God's Spirit."

We must be God's voice and not forego biblical truth with conviction. We must not blur the lines between the world and those called to the cross.

Enough is enough! Remember what James 4:7-10 says: "So let God work his will in you. Yell a loud *no* to the Devil and watch him scamper. Say a quiet *yes* to God and He'll be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field. Hit bottom, and cry your eyes out. The fun and games are over. Get serious, really serious. Get down on your knees before the Master; it's the only way you'll get on your feet" (MSG).

When I walk into heaven, I don't believe God will ask me how cool my services were or how large my gatherings were. He will simply allow His fire to judge my work (1 Cor. 3:13). So the fire we have tried to avoid in our services will be on display in the greatest church service of all time.

I wonder what would happen if every congregational leader stood up one Sunday, bypassed the order of service and declared a holy call to repentance in the sight of God. The world is spinning out of control and needs a church that will bring it back to repentance. This generation desires the depth of God's truth and not just the crumbs found under the table. God has not called us to shrink back! Will you respond to the call, church?

Patrick Schatzline is president of Mercy Seat Ministries and author of *Why Is God So Mad at Me?* and *I Am Remnant*, which released March 2014. He and his wife, Karen, travel the world

speaking about the love and power of God. They reside in Birmingham, Alabama.

Evangelist Patrick Schatzline explains what it will take to bring revival within the church and to our nation at

Love Will Have the Final Word

Jason Gray (Centricity)

The title of Jason Gray's newest Centricity Music release, *Love Will Have the Final Word*, speaks of decisiveness and closure. It's a statement of confidence and determination. And it's true—we live in the assurance that through all our ups and downs, the ultimate victory has already been decided for us. Love wins every time.

This soul-stirring collection of music speaks directly and powerfully to very real and complex circumstances. The album illuminates humanity's lowest and highest points and shows empathy as well as advice for successfully making it through even the toughest situations.

Jason Gray has emerged as a songwriter of extraordinary depth, with a noteworthy ability to convey deep theological truths. The Minnesota native, whose 2011 release, *A Way to See in the Dark*, was named the best album of the year by critics and garnered three top-five radio singles, steadily draws listeners on an emotional level, offering not escape or distraction but healing and hope.

Mission at Nuremberg

Tim Townsend (HarperCollins)

Mission at Nuremberg tells the gripping true-life story of St. Louis Lutheran minister Henry Gerecke. In 1943 and at the age of 50, Gerecke told his wife he was enlisting as a U.S. Army chaplain. As two of his three sons faced danger and death on the battlefield during the height of World War II, Gerecke tended to 2,000 battered bodies and souls of wounded and dying GIs each month in the war hospitals just outside London.

Then, at the war's end, when other soldiers were going home, Gerecke was recruited for the most difficult job of his life: ministering to 21 Nazi leaders awaiting trial at Nuremberg.

Author Tim Townsend's book charts the complex relationships Gerecke developed with prominent Nazi leaders, including Hermann Goering, a leading member of the Nazi Party; Albert Speer, minister of armaments and war production for the Third Reich; Wilhelm Keitel, a general field marshal, second only to Adolf Hitler in Germany's military hierarchy; and Joachim von Ribbentrop, Nazi Germany's foreign minister. Townsend shares the stunning conversations and confessions shared among the former elite of the Third Reich as they neared the court's judgment and their executions.

Crafted from meticulous research and firsthand interviews with key individuals who were present at the trials, the book is a thought-provoking look at one of the most horrifying times in human history. Approaching the trial from a complex angle, Townsend probes difficult spiritual and ethical issues that continue to hold meaning and compels readers to rethink what they know about the power of forgiveness.

Townsend, a former religion reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and three-time winner of the Reporter of the Year award by the Religion Newswriters Association, reveals that Nuremberg chaplains like Gerecke “were not judging the members of their flocks, nor were they forgiving their crimes against humanity. Instead, they were trying to lead those Nazis who were willing to follow toward a deeper insight into what they had done.”

Borderland

John Mark McMillan (Lionhawk Records)

Singer-songwriter John Mark McMillan is set to unveil his latest studio album, completely funded by a Kickstarter campaign, titled *Borderland*. This is the first album released through McMillan’s recently launched record label, Lionhawk Records. It was backed by more than 1,500 supporters who raised more than \$69,000—exceeding the project’s \$40,000 goal.

“*Borderland* speaks to the idea of the ‘place between places,’” McMillan says, “which is where I feel I’ve been living as a person, as an artist and as a believer for a couple of years. ... It is also a concept everyone can relate to. We all walk lines between work and family, love and responsibility, art and commerce, passion and business, and so on. Many of these songs are my commentary from a life between the crevices and on the verge.”

The Charlotte, N.C., native’s previous work continues to find success. “Seen a Darkness,” from his previous album, *Economy*, was featured in the promo for an episode of the ABC show *Grey’s Anatomy*, and his single “How He Loves” was recently listed by Integrity Music as one of the 25 most influential

worship songs in the past 25 years and still ranks on CCLI's Top 25 chart.

God's Not Dead

Pure Flix

When a college student is tasked with scientifically proving the existence of God to his professor and classmates, he's forced to examine his beliefs. If his argument fails to convince, he fails the class. Now a movie, *God's Not Dead* weaves stories from multiple characters with perspectives on faith, doubt and disbelief and culminates in a dramatic call to action: If you believe God's not dead, prove it.

Based on the book of the same name by Rice Broocks, co-founder of the Every Nation family of churches, *God's Not Dead* explores the historical, scientific and theological evidence that God is anything but dead.

"I think so many people know God is real, but they haven't ever been challenged to show it," Broocks says. "And I think a lot of people know God is real but want to know if you can give them a way to describe it to a person that doesn't believe."

The film is an avenue for a wide variety of people to hear the message.

"These brilliant folks from Pure Flix have come along and put together this movie that can bring [the concept of *God's Not Dead*] in the form of story to go places that the book and music will never go," Broocks says.

The movie highlights a star-studded cast, including Kevin

Sorbo (*Soul Surfer*), Shane Harper (*High School Musical 2*), David A.R. White (*Six: The Mark Unleashed*) and Dean Cain (*Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*), with special appearances by the Newsboys and Willie and Korie Robertson of the popular reality TV series *Duck Dynasty*.

God's Not Dead will release on more than 600 screens nationally this month. The film is rated PG. —*Felicia Abraham*