

First-Time Author Wins 2020 Christian Book of the Year

Despite having to cancel its annual live presentation celebrating Christian books and authors, the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA) announced virtually on May 5 the judges' pick for the 2020 Christian Book of the Year as well as the winners of the 2020 Christian Book Awards.

The winner of this year's top book—Pastor Mark Vroegop—is also a first-time published author, and he won the New Author category as well. Published by Crossway, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament* is about bringing our sorrow to God through lament.

"Mark Vroegop's book was published a year ago, yet its message could not be more relevant to what we are going through today," says ECPA President Stan Jantz, who announced the awards in black-and-white formalwear. "It is a deeply moving book about trusting the grace and goodness of God in the midst of sorrow and darkness. As Mark writes, 'Lament stands in the gap between pain and promise.'"

The announcements were made in the afternoon—for the first time via live webcast—to an audience of more than 350 industry professionals, authors and publishers. Usually the winners are announced at an awards banquet held during the ECPA Leadership Summit, which was postponed due to the pandemic.

The webcast featured Pinnacle Award recipient and bestselling author of *The Power of a Praying* series, Stormie Omartian. Known for her books on prayer, which have sold more than 40 million copies, Omartian closed the 30-minute webcast with a Spirit-led prayer for the publishers and authors in the industry who have been greatly affected by the global pandemic.

Omartian prayed for the readers of the books as well as the authors and publishers in the Christian book industry.

"I pray that they will see great hunger for God like never before as well," she said as she prayed for Christian publishers. "I pray the openness for more Bibles and books will increase, not diminish. It will become greater. I pray people will desire books that change lives and that it will increase beyond what we've ever seen in the past. I pray that the horrific nature of this terrible pandemic has opened hearts to the need for the all-powerful God of the universe, for whom nothing is impossible. I pray you, Lord, will do a miracle in the recovery period of each publishing house to even beyond what it was before. Open hearts, open doors, like never before. Teach us to pray in greater power and depth, Lord. Teach us new things. Help us to hear your voice saying, 'This is the way. Walk in it.'"

Jantz found Omartian's prayer as "so appropriate for this moment," he said. "She prayed for our industry during these trying times, that we would hear His voice and that readers would have the desire for the life-transforming message of Christian books beyond what we've ever seen."

ECPA congratulated all of the winning authors and publishers "with deep appreciation for the excellent and life-changing content they have produced."

See this year's winners here in all 12 categories, which included a tie in the Bibles category.