

About this series of reflections

This is **part 1.1** in “Good News for the Nations,” a series of reflections on the Bible. More specifically, these are (apart from the first reflection) derived from the part of the Bible called the Gospels: the “good news” of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The four Gospels give us the story—in four different perspectives—of how God has come to us in person to give us access to Him—to His love, His power, His honor, His justice—whatever our cultural or social background may be.

To the best of my ability I am taking these texts in chronological order, or, when that is not possible or relevant, in a logical order. For each text I translated the passage from the original language. Next I restated the translation in the idioms I would use in my everyday speech. Then I added my own reflections on what I have heard in the text. My goal was to first understand the train of thought for myself, then to articulate it in a way that might also be helpful to others.

It would be extremely pretentious to suggest that I could be comprehensive in exposing all that a passage of the Bible has to say. But my goal was to notice and point out important ideas that casual readers often miss. I wanted to do this not by burdening the reader with too much information, but by aiming for an accessible, relaxed, and interesting way to read and hear God’s words.

I have done this for myself and my readers, whether few or many. First, this is part of my own way of paying attention to what God tells me and letting it form the way I think about everything. Second, I have the daily pleasure and challenge of helping people from many nations to cope with the demands and pressures of their lives. Many of them have done me the honor of inviting discussion about their own ways of thinking and coping. So I have come to the Bible with their questions and ways of thinking in mind.

I read these passages while thinking not only about the cultures of the original authors, but also about my own culture and sub-cultures, and then about the cultures of my friends from East Asia, the Middle East, and many other regions. I think about the various ways of thinking about life that I have encountered—a variety even within major world views such as Islam, Buddhism, traditional Christianity, Chinese Communism, and Secular Humanism. All cultures have apparent blind spots where they overlook vital questions or information. Since I am still being made aware of my own, I need to be humble enough to remain open to learning what these blind spots are.

To say that more positively, one of the joys of studying these ancient words is finding out how alive they still are. There is a thrill in having lights go on when I see truths that I had not seen before. The thrill is just as great when I see the same thing happening in others. If you have read this far, you probably already knew that.

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