



Echoes of Grace

**WHAT A DUMB WAY
TO DIE!**



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WHAT A DUMB WAY TO DIE!

Surrounded by huge twisted rocks, sagebrush and West Texas wilderness the cherry red helicopter lifted off the ground, tilted its rotors forward and struggled to rise into the air. The weight of Jeff and his four companions along with a full tank of fuel dragged it back toward earth. Then the tail section struck a scrubby tree and the helicopter staggered, caught one of its big toes in a mound of earth and lurched toward a creek. What final thoughts flashed through the founder of Amazon.com Jeff Bezos' mind as the sounds of ripping metal filled his ears and flying dirt and rushing water filled his vision?

Few people have Jeff's long-range vision, tenacity and relentless drive. In 1994 the Princeton graduate came across a shocking statistic: Users of the Internet were growing at a rate of 2300% a year. Working as a financial analyst with a healthy wage, Jeff spotted a unique opportu-

nity. While traveling cross-country with his wife, he schemed up a way to turn the exploding new information pipeline into a tool to transform retailing operations worldwide. He'd start with selling books, since they were easy to store and ship, and then he'd grow from there into worldwide retail domination. Bezos worked on a "regret minimization" framework to guide his thoughts. He knew that if he stayed with his relatively comfortable career, he'd forever regret not taking this huge chance to win the future of retailing.

SIGHTS SET ON THE FUTURE

Moving cross-country to be near a major book distribution warehouse, working out of the garage in his house, using a desk made from an old door and with a website domain name of Relentless.com, Bezos set his sights on the future. In 1999, only five years removed from dragging books up the basement stairs and running them to the post office in his Chevy Blazer, Bezos' company was already worth \$1,000,000,000 but faced a difficult decision. They already planned on spending \$240,000,000 to build four massive fulfillment warehouses, but what about an extra \$60,000,000 for one more that all the critics and many top executives deemed unnecessary? But

long-range thinkers don't timidly bank on only the present, do they? Not only did they build 5 that year, but Amazon.com now has nearly 100 such centers and is steadily building more. One of the latest of these, opened in Maryland in September 2014, has 2.4 million square feet. That would house more than 1,500 identical replicas of my house—Jeff certainly doesn't think small.

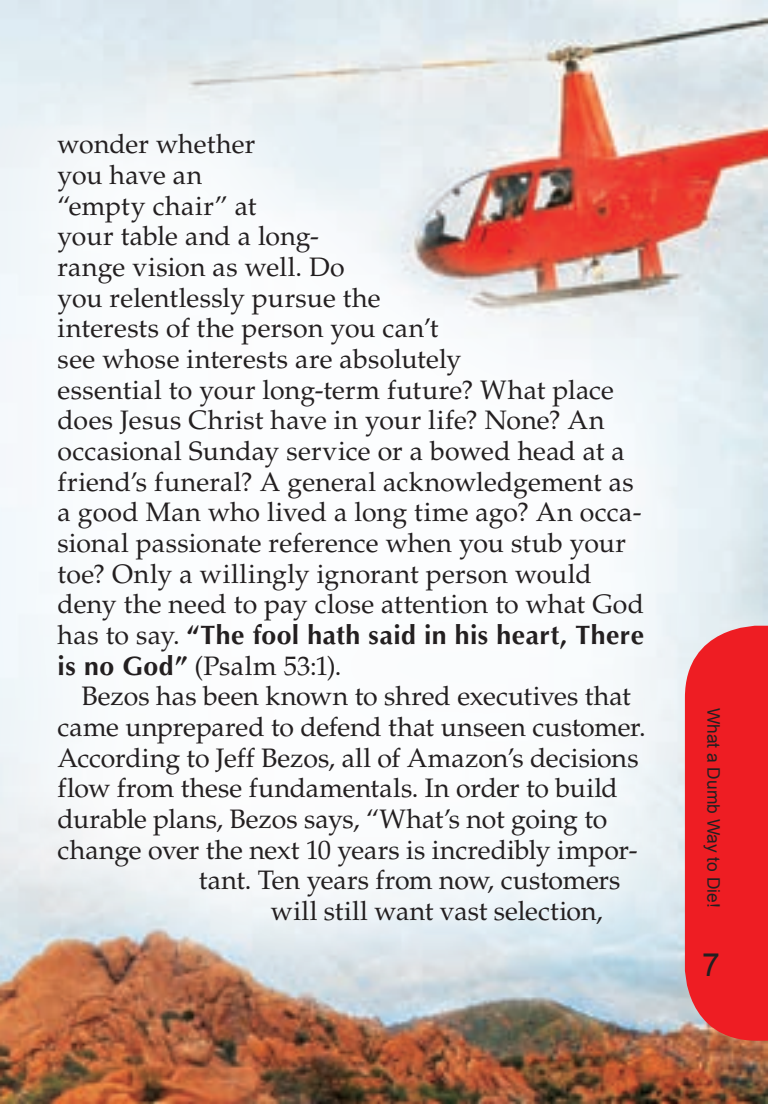
Not only does he not think small, but he also doesn't think slowly. Amazon has a patent on technology that ships a product toward you before you know you want it. Their computers are busy watching what you're shopping for, what you've already bought and how you're likely to behave in the future. Armed with that knowledge, Amazon now can ship something you want to the nearest warehouse to your home even before you click the Buy button. And when you order, there are even jokes about Amazon's Yesterday Shipping where a package arrives on your doorstep the day before you actually order. While that may be a joke, if you live in Manhattan, you may now select 1-hour shipping for a modest fee of \$8. If you're willing to wait two hours, you can get your product without any extra delivery charge.

While waiting 2 or 3 days to have
your order filled seems like
yesterday's thinking,

so does having UPS or the Postal Service drop the order off at your door. Just before Thanksgiving in 2013, Amazon announced it was testing the delivery of its packages using remote control flying drones. Regulatory bodies like the FAA in the U.S. haven't signed off on the concept yet, but that doesn't mean Amazon hasn't gotten up to the eighth generation of its designs. Jeff seems to be looking past the slow-moving government bodies to the day when the little whirring rotors will whizz around your neighborhood. After all, who wants to wait in a day when books, music and movies are in our hands minutes after being discovered on Amazon.com? That sounds like impressive future vision to me. But is all that exciting focus on instant gratification subtly hiding something far more critical from your sight and Jeff's?

A LONG-RANGE VISION

Jeff Bezos is famous for putting customers first in every discussion of company plans. In fact, his strategy sessions often include an empty chair which represents the Amazon customer. No long-range plan can leave the room if it hasn't passed the inspection of the mythical customer in the empty chair. Jeff has a clear idea of what that person wants. That makes me



wonder whether you have an “empty chair” at your table and a long-range vision as well. Do you relentlessly pursue the interests of the person you can’t see whose interests are absolutely essential to your long-term future? What place does Jesus Christ have in your life? None? An occasional Sunday service or a bowed head at a friend’s funeral? A general acknowledgement as a good Man who lived a long time ago? An occasional passionate reference when you stub your toe? Only a willingly ignorant person would deny the need to pay close attention to what God has to say. **“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”** (Psalm 53:1).

Bezos has been known to shred executives that came unprepared to defend that unseen customer. According to Jeff Bezos, all of Amazon’s decisions flow from these fundamentals. In order to build durable plans, Bezos says, “What’s not going to change over the next 10 years is incredibly important. Ten years from now, customers will still want vast selection,

low prices and fast, accurate delivery. In fact, it is impossible to imagine a world 10 years from now where customers will say, I love Amazon, but I wish your prices would be higher.” Jeff’s company turns 21 this year. If it were a male human, it wouldn’t even be able to get reasonable car insurance yet. His long term vision hasn’t yet built a fully mature adult. In fact, Jeff Bezos still refers to this as Day One of the Internet era. But he needs to see past the exciting changes in retailing, past his human customers and deeper into the future.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT?

So what does that unseen person you’re supposed to serve—God—want? Amazon paws through mountains of data to figure out what its unseen customer wants, but you don’t need to let it get that complicated. God’s given us a book, the Bible, with answers that even a small child could understand to the most fundamental long-range questions that can be asked. There may be a mountain of questions tumbling around in your head, but some of the deepest ones have simple answers that aren’t going to change in 10 years, a lifetime or an eternity. There’s a loving God who has a personal interest in you. Your relationship

with Him has been ruptured by your sin. There's a way back to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ's suffering for sin on a cross. If you fail to deal with that fundamental reality due to shortsighted focus, your long-term prospects are incredibly sad. Open God's Word and see what He has to say. You'll be amazed to see what He sees in you. You'll also be amazed to discover what it does to your long-term vision. **"The word of God is [living], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do"** (Hebrews 4:12-13).

"LIFE ETERNAL"

When Jeff Bezos' cherry red helicopter spun out of control and rolled into the wilderness creek, did his life flash before him? Were there grand thoughts about what he was about to miss out on in life? With his signature monstrous laugh, Jeff answers that no, "I thought, what a dumb way to die!" Did he learn anything from his near-death moment? At

least now he avoids riding in helicopters. But what about opening up his eyes to look past his very short-term life and into the unimaginably long eternity? I can find no indication that Jeff Bezos now views God as the important One he must serve. What about you? What lies after your death? If you allow the fog of daily life to block your vision about eternity, I could only agree with Jeff, “What a dumb way to die!” But if you open your heart to Jesus, the Son of God, you’ll discover **“this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent”** (John 17:3). Will you regret taking the short-term view and turning down “eternal life”?

Read about how to have your long-term vision restored in *Staring Down Blindness*. ◀



STARING DOWN



BLINDNESS

My grandmother lost her sight to an inherited eye condition. I have a clear memory of her bumping into things as she slowly moved about my mother's kitchen. Then my father also began to lose his sight. Eventually he had a corneal transplant. He had to wait several months first for a tissue match and then through a full year of healing.

Now I stared through my worsening eyes at the two options facing me—have a corneal transplant or go blind. Not much of a choice!

As my vision became cloudier, I realized what a precious gift sight is. The Lord Jesus opened the eyes of the blind on several occasions while He was here on earth. Matthew 9:28-30 gives one example: **“Jesus ... then touched ... their eyes ... and their eyes were opened.”** Jesus gave sight to the blind, yes, but more importantly He came to open our spiritual eyes to “see” our own sinful condition and our need for a Saviour. **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”** (1 Timothy 1:15).


Modern medicine has improved the procedure since my father had surgery. Now only the diseased part of my eye would need to be removed to be replaced by healthy tissue from a donor's eye. The tissues wouldn't even need to be matched, and heal-

ing would take only a few weeks. So I went to the surgeon and submitted myself to the eye operation. It was done in a morning, and I was home by noon.

But let's not forget the donor. Someone had to die to provide me with the healthy tissue I needed to restore my eyesight. Sobering thought! And Someone had to die to remove our sins—the Lord Jesus. He became our “donor” when He gave **“Himself a ransom for all”** (1 Timothy 2:6). It was His sacrifice, His bloodshed, that allows us to be free forever from the penalty of our sins, a lost eternity in the lake of fire. And what must we do to have this salvation? **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”** (Acts 16:31).

It's amazing how wonderful it was to be able to see clearly again and to have the threat of total blindness all but removed. But this is nothing compared to what the heavenly Father through His Son, the Lord Jesus, gives us when **“the eyes of your understanding being enlightened...[to] know the hope of His calling...the riches of the glory of His inheritance...and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe”** (Ephesians 1:18-19).

Confess your sins to the Lord Jesus today, believe on Him and be saved! **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”** (1 John 1:9).

The beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ can fill the eyes with tears and wipe them dry too. See how in *Eyes Full of Tears*. 

EYES FULL OF TEARS

On a recent plane flight out of Chicago, I was reading a Christian book and taking notes when the lady next to me asked me if I was preparing for a sermon. "I see you're reading Leviticus," she said. I explained that I wasn't preparing a sermon but just making notes on parts that were important to me and that I wanted to remember.

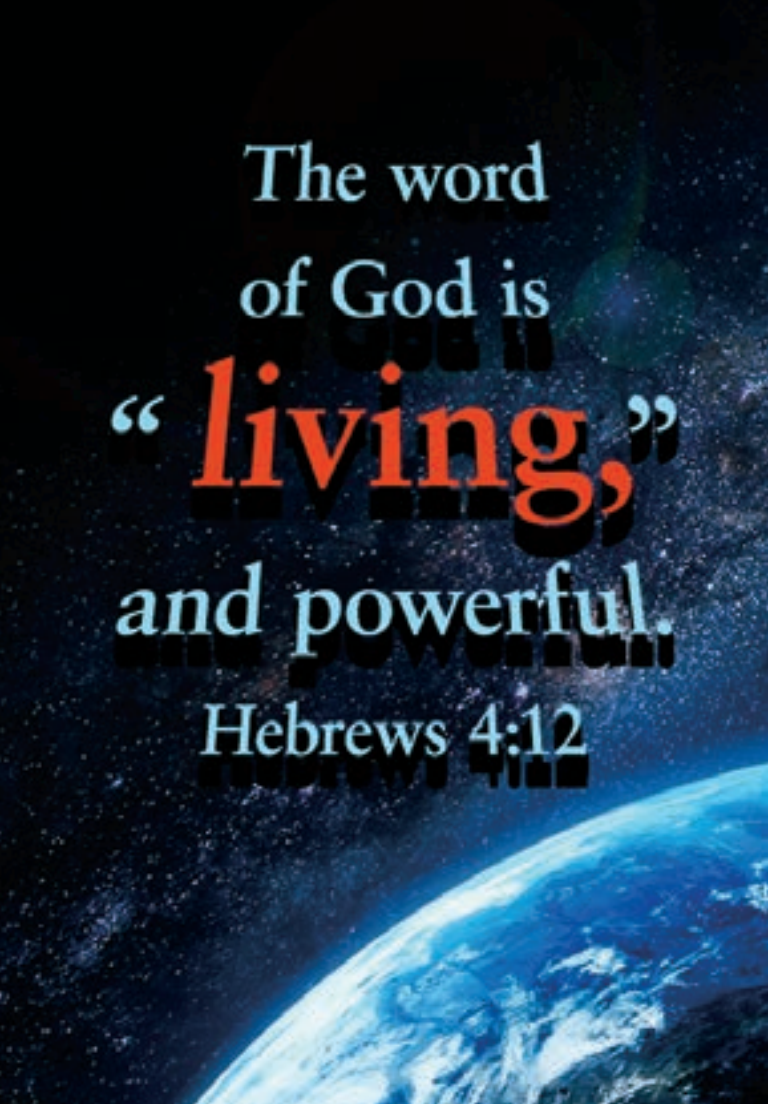
"You seem to know a little about the Bible," I said, noting that she recognized Leviticus as one of the books of the Bible. It was not long before she gave me a short history of her life and religious upbringing, which left out many of the wonderful details of God's love and the real value of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary.

As we began to discuss how God in His love gave His only begotten Son to save lost sinners and that He died, taking the wrath of God for the sins of lost sinners like me, I could see the tears begin to puddle in her eyes.

“What a wonderful story! I could start bawling right now, but I don’t want to embarrass you,” she said, as she waved her hand in front of her face to calm herself down. She was clearly touched by what we had been talking about. I told her that Jesus died not only for her present sins but for every sin she had ever committed, but that it could only be true of her *if* she accepted Him as her very own Saviour. She said that she believed in Jesus but had never heard these wonderful truths before and that now she had such peace in hearing them.

We talked for about an hour and shared many more thoughts from the Scriptures that she had never heard before and that gave her both joy and peace. It was beautiful to see the grace of God at work, as both the Word of God and the Spirit of God brought the full meaning of the work of Christ into a searching heart. **“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”** (Ephesians 1:7).

Have, at least figuratively, tears of repentance filled your eyes? God promises that in the short term **“He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness”** (Psalm 107:9). In the long run He says, **“God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain”** (Revelation 21:4). ◀



The word
of God is
“**living,**”
and powerful.
Hebrews 4:12

ECHOES OF GRACE

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Jesus said: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

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