

Where in the World Are We?

*Christ says that though we live in this world,
we are not to be of this world.*

By DAVID LANGFORD

THE CHRISTIAN
Appeal

Preface



John Gulley

In his amazing prayer in John 17, our Lord prays for his disciples, then and now. We are citizens here in this present world, but we are first and foremost citizens of God's Kingdom. We are *in* this world, but we are not to be *of* it. But even as we're tempted to retreat from it or bide our time until we're removed from it, Christ calls us to be in this world in the same way that he was in this world. In this issue, Consulting Editor David Langford ably challenges us to follow Christ as we live into this crucial calling.

By Dr. David Langford

We as Christ's disciples are charged to live in this world but to realize that we do not belong to it.



John Gulley

“I have given them
your word and
the world has hated them,
for they are not
of the world any more
than I am of the
world.”

Jesus
John 17

Where in the World Are We?



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Where in the World Are We?

We live in a troubled country, a divided nation. In the beginning of our country, our leaders adopted the motto *e pluribus unum*, “out of many, one,” referring to all the different people who came together to become one nation. As our nation nears its 250th birthday, it feels the opposite is happening—“out of one, many.”

Paul referred to a “dividing wall of hostility” to describe the tension between Jews and Gentiles. There was in fact a wall dividing the outer court of the Temple, known as the court of the Gentiles, from the inner Temple.

But, of course, there are many dividing walls of hostility in every society, walls that fragment society into adversarial groups. Our nation is divided politically, economically, racially, socially, and religiously. Such divisions create enough tensions between people, but those natural tensions get inflamed into hostility—and sometimes even hate—by a media that seems

more interested in highlighting our divisions than in healing them.

A Troubled Time

Living in a troubled time can create in us a kind of fight-or-flight response. For some of us, when we see people advancing social or political agendas different from our own, we feel the urge to fight them, defeat them. We are drawn to the metaphor of war to describe our situation, as seen in the titles of books like *Culture Wars*, *A War for the Soul of America*, *How to Win the Culture War*.

Others are not so inclined to fight. They’d rather take flight from the trouble and hostility and live somewhere away from the trouble, in holy huddles, surrounded by similar people. We gather in churches with members who look and think like we do; we move to regions that more closely reflect our values. We hope somehow the hostility and division will just go away. Until it does, we just want to go away.

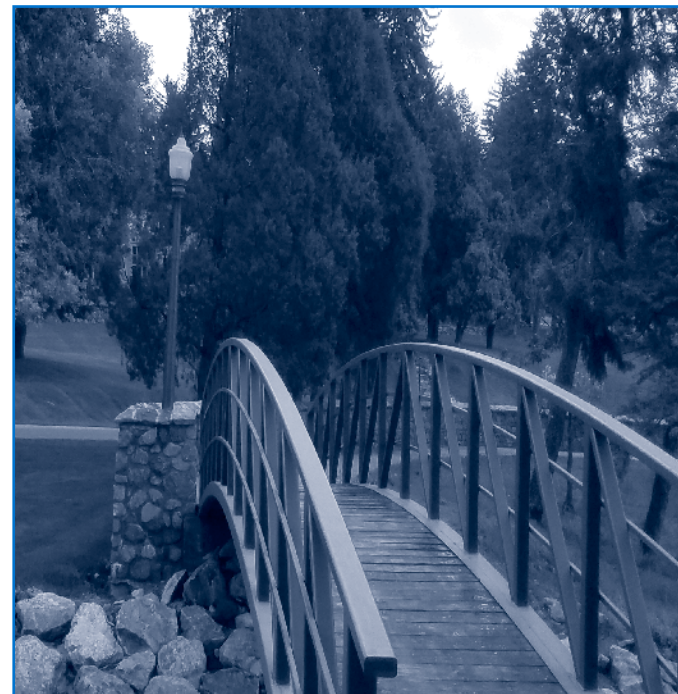
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Neither of these responses is what our Lord has called us to. Christ has not called us to fight people or to be in flight from people. So what is the proper response for us in this world? What in the world should we do? How in the world should we be? Where in the world are we supposed to be?

We might find an answer in Jesus’ words to his disciples who lived in a world far more hostile to them than ours is to us.

Note that Jesus did not give them much reason to think that hostility was going to change any time soon. When he gathered his disciples in that upper room for that last supper, he told them some hard truths about living in this world.

“If the world hates you,” he said, “keep in mind that it hated



Curtis Shelburne

me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (John 15:18-19).

Later that same night, as he

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is about to go to his cross, Jesus prays to his Father for his disciples.

“I have given them your word and the world has hated them,” he says, “for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.”

He continues, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it . . . As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:13-19).

Jesus does not advocate that we take flight from the world. His prayer is not that the Father take us “out of the world.” Nor does he urge us to fight the world, at least not the way the world fights. Jesus says his disciples are “not of” this world. That word “of” means “to

belong to or to be of the same nature.” Jesus prays that his disciples would be in this world but in the world in a different way, not of the same nature as this world.

Then Jesus prays, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (17:18). These words show up again three chapters later in John’s version of Jesus’ Great Commission:

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (20:21).

What Is Jesus Saying?

So what is Jesus saying to his disciples? This, I think. “I want you to be in this world the way I was in this world.”

Notice the similarity of the words at the end of John’s

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Gospel and the words at the beginning of it.

John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning . . .”

He continues, “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”

“Yet,” the apostle proclaims, “to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:1-2, 9-13).

In the beginning, Christ was neither in the world nor of the

world. Then the Father sent him into the world. But even though



Jim Shelburne

he was *in* the world, he was not *of* the world, in the sense of “belonging to” the world. In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson paraphrases by saying that Jesus was “not defined” by the world. Following Jesus does not take us out of this world, but it does radically change the way we are in this world.

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Remember how John describes believers: “To those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband’s will, but born of God” (1:12-13).

If We’re Serious

If we are really serious about following Jesus, it is important that we understand how he changes the way we are in this world.

Like Jesus we are *in* this world, but we are *of* another. We live in this world; we work in this world, we are very involved in this world in all kinds of ways, but we are of another world. We are like a colony, residents in this world but citizens of another world.

Seriously, we are supposed to be heaven on earth.

A colony is a community of people in one country but from another. They may be sent there for some purpose, perhaps military or diplomatic. Whatever their reason for being there, they remain subject to their homeland. Think of entering an ethnic community in a city like a “Little Italy” or “Chinatown.”

Upon entering, one immediately senses a different atmosphere; the sights, sounds, smells, and the people themselves reflect a different culture. In some ways they reflect the country they’re in. In more substantial ways they reflect the country they’re from.

Scripture calls us to be a colony of heaven in this world.

Following Jesus does not take us out of this world, but it does radically change the way we are “in” this world.



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This is part of what Peter means when he reminds us we are “strangers” in this world. By this he does not mean we’re no longer citizens of the cities and countries we live in, but he does mean we have a higher citizenship; we are primarily colonists of the Kingdom, and our first allegiance is to our King. Because of that, though we may be located in a particular place, and in some ways reflect the culture of that place, in more substantial ways we reflect the culture of our homeland, the values and truths of our King.

Colonies of Heaven

As colonies of heaven, the sights, sounds, and smells, the very atmosphere of our faith community should reflect the

place of our new origin, the realm in which we were born again.

When one is born again, he’s no longer defined in mere natural or national terms. Paul speaks of the new life that has entered him as a life that cannot be understood in merely natural terms. He writes, “I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me. The life I now live

in the body I live by faith in the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20).

Paul also says we are no longer defined by our nationality. Paul was a Roman citizen, and there is every reason to believe he was thankful to have such a citizenship. But he also understood that he was not defined by that citizenship. He wrote to the

Scripture calls us to be a colony of heaven in this world; citizens where we live, our first allegiance is to our King.



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Philippians, “Our citizenship is in heaven” (3:20).

So how we are in this world has changed. To some who hear the phrase “in the world but not of it,” it means we are here temporarily, only until Jesus returns and rescues us from this world that is not our home. This mindset implies that while we are here, we must keep away from the world, have little to do with this world, and convince as many as possible to get their ticket stamped for the bus to heaven.

Not Anxious to Leave

But not everyone is eager to leave this world for heaven. So I learned the preacher who asked, “Whoever wants to go to heaven, raise your hand.” Everyone did except one little boy. Later the preacher asked the boy, “Don’t you want to go to heaven?” The boy replied, “Sure, but I thought you were getting up a busload to go right now!”

Many people, even Christians, have an image of heaven that



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is less exciting to them than this world. I remember when I first felt this tension as a young boy on my way to the park to play baseball. As I was waiting to cross the street, for some reason I began to think about heaven. The image that came into my mind was an eternity of “three songs and a prayer.” That was not encouraging. I mean, it was better than the

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another totally different world; the biblical image of heaven is this world restored and transformed into the world God intended when he first created it for us.

We sing, “This world is not my home.” I don’t disagree, as long as we understand that the Bible uses the word “world” in different ways. In one sense, the Bible speaks of this world as an evil place where we don’t belong. We are told not to conform to the pattern of this world (Romans 12:1), not to be taken captive by this world’s philosophies (Colossians 2:8). We are warned that to be a friend of this world is to be an enemy of God (James 4:4).

alternative, but honestly, I’d rather be playing baseball in the park.

A More Accurate Picture

One reason my image of heaven was not appealing was that it was not biblical. When the Bible speaks of the new world coming, “the new heaven and the new earth” (Revelation 21:1), the idea is not leaving this world and going to

But sometimes the Bible speaks of this world as our home, albeit one that has fallen from what God created it to be. It is a world under the temporary rule of an evil prince and his dark forces. Scripture pictures a world that is, like us, yearning for its own transformation. In a remarkable passage, Paul speaks of creation’s anticipation of the new

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creation, the new world that is coming.

Paul writes, “The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

For the creation was subjected to frustration,” he explains, “not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.” Then in a striking metaphor, he proclaims, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:19-22).

The prophets also speak of the new world coming not as a world foreign to us, but a world somehow not unlike ours, except

gloriously restored, where the wolf and lamb lay down together, streams and mountains burst into song, and the trees of the field clap their hands.

The church is not a holy huddle waiting to be rescued; we are citizens of God's Kingdom sent with amazing news.



“In the World”
To be “in the world but not of it” doesn’t mean huddling together in a corner, holding on to each other, hoping to survive until the Lord comes and whisks us away. Jesus didn’t talk about taking us away from this world. He told Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), but he didn’t say it wasn’t in this world.

Here’s the truth: Jesus is already King in this world. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). The church is not a holy huddle waiting

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to be rescued; we are citizens of the Kingdom of God sent into this world like a vanguard under orders from our King to spread the news that the King has come; even now he sits on his throne.

This is the message of Revelation sent to persecuted believers. Jesus pulls the veil aside (the literal meaning of Revelation) and shows the truth behind the curtain. Even now Jesus is on his throne, and he rules.

Our King commands us, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). We have been sent to every nation with the good news that the Creator has entered into the creation. He entered our world to remake us—but not just us; his mission is bigger than us. He has come to recreate the whole world

into the kind of world he envisioned when he first created it all. The Church is the vanguard of the King, sent into the world on the

King’s business. Our prayer is the King’s prayer: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Our purpose is to do our part to make that prayer come true.

The Church is the vanguard of the King, sent into the world on the King's business.



The Underground
True, the enemy has occupied this

world, but Christians are a spiritual “Underground.” Like the famous French Underground in WWII, our mission is to undermine the enemy at every turn, to take back this world—every nation, tribe, and soul—until our King finally returns to wage the final battle. Rather than give up on our world and waiting

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for the end to come, we have been given very different orders. Jesus is saying, “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you into this world, to be in this world the way I was in this world.”

An Eloquent Vision

Paul gives an eloquent vision of how we are to be in this world: “If anyone is in Christ,” he writes, “the new creation has come. The old has gone; the new is here.” And make no mistake! “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.”

And so, God “has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We

are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s

behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Too often our only message to this world has been, “Believe in Christ so you can escape this hopeless world, avoid hell, and land in heaven.” But Christ was not in this world waiting to leave

it; our Lord was in this world working to change it.

Our agenda is no different than the agenda our Savior gave in Luke 4 when he said, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for

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the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (4:18-19).

Christ Calls Us

Christ didn’t come just to change our future destiny; he came to change our present reality, too. Christ did not come into the world to take us out of the world or tell us to give up on the world. We have been sent into this world to work alongside him, or more accurately, for him to work in us through the Holy Spirit to change a world of troubled, suffering, disillusioned, polarized people in desperate need of the truth that brings peace, healing, meaning, and reconciliation.

We are not called to run away from or be rescued from the troubles of this world. Christ calls us to do just the opposite—to do what he did, to enter this world and run to the trouble and

to those who are troubled. Christ is the ultimate first responder; if we would be his disciples, we must be like him.

This is what Christians have always done. Christians were sent into a world of disease and sickness; they brought the world



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an army of mercy and care.

In A.D. 325, a decision was made by Christian leaders to build hospitals in cities across the Roman Empire. One of the first was built by Saint Sampson the Hospitable, whose home for years had been devoted to caring for the sick and the poor. The

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modern hospital is the result of Christians sent into the world but who were not of the world.

Christians were sent into a world oppressed by magic and superstition; they brought to the world an even greater mystery called science. The great majority of the fathers of modern science were believers in God; modern science is the result of Christians like Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Bacon, and Faraday, sent into a world with a faith that enabled them to believe this world was meaningful and ordered.

Christians came into a world of tragedy and catastrophe and brought mercy. Henry Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross, was a devout Christian who

witnessed the devastation of the battle of Solferino, Italy, and saw 23,000 wounded, dead, or dying on the battleground with

little attempt by anyone to care. He organized relief work for that battle, then organized a movement to provide relief around the world to all who were suffering devastation; the Red Cross was born. Dunant was sent into the world with a mercy not of this world.

Unfortunately, with regard to slavery, there was no shortage of Christians who were in this world and of it. But slavery was eventually ended by Christians like William Wilberforce, who devoted his life to ending it in England. In America, long before the Civil War, voices like

We are not called to run away from or be rescued from the troubles of this world; Christ calls us to be an army of mercy.



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James Oglethorpe's in Georgia, the Mennonite believers in Pennsylvania, and leaders of the Second Great Awakening pleaded with fellow Americans to end it and laid the foundation for emancipation in this country. Tragically these voices could not stop a civil war.

Examples Abound

Many more examples could be given of Christians sent into the world with a nature not of this world. Christians brought education to those who couldn't afford it, passed laws to protect children from being used as cheap labor and women being treated as property. Christians came into a world of the homeless, the fatherless, those without family, and built homes to live in and provided

families to surround them with love. These examples teach us that the command to "go into all the world" is more than a command to go into every nation; it is also a command to go into every vocation, allowing God's Spirit access to our knowledge and skill to transform this world.

The command to go into every nation is also a command to go into every vocation to transform this world.



In This World

Christ calls us to be in this world, but in it in a very different way. We follow him not to enjoy what this world defines as "the good life." In fact, the life to which Christ calls us may very well demand of us great suffering. Peter warned his original readers—and us—not to be surprised at the "fiery ordeal" that had come on them "to test" them,

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“as though something strange were happening.” He goes so far as to say instead, “Rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed,” and he promises, “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you” (1 Peter 4:12-14).

If you became a Christian to escape trouble or avoid suffering, then you are trying to be a Christian who looks very little like Christ. Christ told his disciples on the eve of his death, “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart for I have overcome this world. . . . My peace I give you. I do not give to you peace as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14).

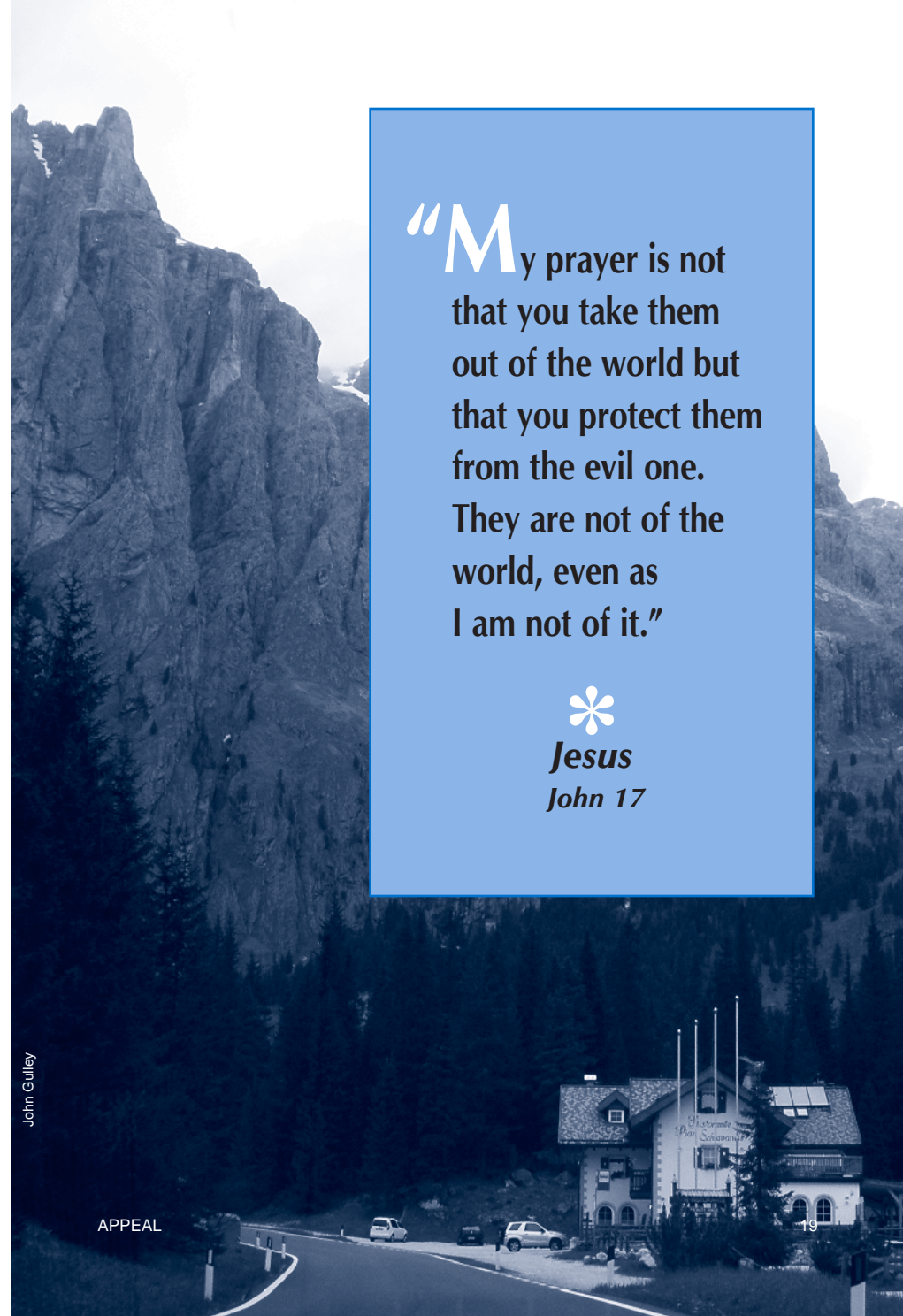
And so we live in this world with no doubt that God is in control and Christ is King, no matter what the circumstances around us may imply. We serve the Christ who came into this world to bring the message of God’s love and salvation and to begin the work of new creation, first with us, the Church, and one day, with a new heaven and a new earth. That hope sustains us and enables us to endure whatever suffering or hostility may come, to love those who hate us, and to forgive those who mistreat us.

This has been God’s purpose for us from the beginning. We were created to be in this world and of God, his image reflecting his glory to all.



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Jesus
John 17

*An inspiring look into the
winsomeness of our Lord.*

A FINE BOOK

by

Dr. David Langford

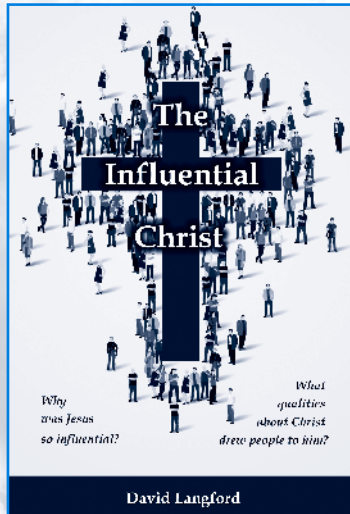
focuses on some

*of the most
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Lord, the amazingly

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