

PRAISE FOR *ECHO: UNBROKEN TRUTH.* *WORTH REPEATING. AGAIN.*

I truly wish this book had been around when I was a young Christian! In this brilliant work, Rev. Jonathan Fisk discusses the very fundamentals of the Christian faith in a fresh yet profound manner. He lets the Word of God dispossess the fallen *Me* of all thought of being able to save myself. But then he allows the Word to bring me the certainty of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the message that all Christians, young and old, need to read, hear from the pulpit, and study time and again!

HARRI HUOVINEN,
*pastor, the Evangelical Lutheran
Mission Diocese of Finland*

A retired Australian pastor once said to me that ours is not a truly confessional church unless our theology counteracts the world around us. Jonathan Fisk has done a fine job in providing both a biting critique of today's culture and a hearty presentation of the twenty-four-carat Gospel. Using the classic structure of catechesis, this book is an engaging read with plenty of salt, written in a unique and witty style. Thanks, Jonathan, for a terrific resource to share with friends and inquirers!

PASTOR STEPHEN VAN DER HOEK,
*Maryborough-Childers Lutheran Parish,
Queensland, Australia*

Pastor Fisk writes in such a way that the reader has time to reflect on the profound truths of God's Word. Responding in faith, the reader learns to echo that Word back to God. Unlike *A Passage to India*, where Mrs. Moore's "God loves you" reduces to an incomprehensible "ou-boom," God is clearly speaking His changeless Word as Pastor Fisk echoes the word of the cross over and above the meaningless noise of this world.

PASTOR GARRY HEINTZ,
*Église Évangélique Luthérienne de Woerth,
France*

Catechesis means to “sound again” or “repeat”—echo!—the core tenets of our holy faith from catechumen (disciple) to catechist (teacher). *Echo* presents the very best of Jonathan Fisk’s catechetical teaching in his own authentic and distinctively contemporary voice, fraught with common idioms, witticisms, and edge. Aimed to thoughtfully instruct a younger generation of readers and guide them in character formation, *Echo* reverberates the biblical worldview and Christ’s vision of His disciples—be they never so young—pursuing truth, beauty, and goodness. Every junior high student, high school student, and collegian would do well to own these pages to the end that these essential and ever-relevant truths might echo in this generation.

REV. JOHN J. BOMBARO, PHD, LCDR, CHC, USNR,
Grace Lutheran Church
San Diego, California

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UNBROKEN
TRUTH.

WORTH
REPEATING.

AGAIN.

BY JONATHAN FISK



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*For you,
as always.*

*And also for my father,
who has been patient with me.*

God Himself is not ashamed to teach these things daily. He knows nothing better to teach. . . . Can we finish learning in one hour what God Himself cannot finish teaching?

—LC Preface 16

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INTRODUCING YOU, THE SPECIAL (MELTING) SNOWFLAKE



This is you. An average, run-of-the-mill, everyday (boring) person. I know, I know. It's insulting to call you boring when I don't even know you. *You're special. There's no one else like you. You're a snowflake.* It's all very beautiful. Please feel free to draw a snowflake around your head in the picture above. But after we've each taken the time to do that, then the boring fact of the matter is that we all still look like the same average "special" people. Just like everyone else.

We can argue the point about how your snowflakiness is more snowflaky than mine if you think that would be fun. But it's best to just get this out of the way right at the start: **this isn't a book about you.** It's about **unbroken truth** worth repeating so many times that you can't tack enough "agains!" onto the end of it. For that reason, it is about things wonderfully less average and less boring than you. It's about the real big picture. The total expression. The exhaustive metanarrative. That kind of uber-jazz.

You are a part of it. But you are not what it's about. You are way over on the side, trapped in the borders, quite a bit removed from

the middle. But there is a line between the middle and you, and that's important. Because the middle is Jesus. Who Jesus **is**. What Jesus has **done**. What Jesus is **doing**. What Jesus is still **going to do**. Not only is all that significantly more interesting than you, but it also has far more power to change your life than any edge of your snowflakiness could possibly hope for.

Now, I'm not making any promises that this book will make all the bad things in life go away. It will not grant you superhuman willpower or magically increase the virility of your righteousness meter. But you will learn the distilled, unbreakable Christian Echo, the very thing that has radically changed humanity in every nation and tongue where it's ever been repeated. You will learn why these Three Foundational Realities—the Ten Important Things about Being Creation, the Three Elements and Five Results of the Gospel, and the Seven Edges of Christian Holification—are more than just a series of boring stuff that old boring people make you boringly memorize on boring afternoons so that you can stop having to

**That you may be able
to withstand in the evil
day, and having done all,
to stand firm.**

Ephesians 6:13

go to boring Sunday School. They are a total operating system for your brain. They are the most astoundingly complete description of what life is and why it is worth living. They are the golden nugget of ultimate spirituality that will give boring little you the conviction to stand with your head held high, no matter how boring the evil days around you might be or not be.

The first step to standing firm, the first step for having your mind and psyche unleashed by the unbroken truth of Christianity, is not fighting too hard against what it has to say about you.

Exciting.

Boring.

Powerful.

Weak.

Energetic.

Lazy.

Broken.

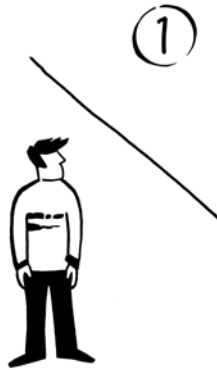
You.



Take a good long look in the mirror if you need to. Being honest with yourself is just about the most courageous thing a human can try to do. Greatness and horribleness, magnificence and blahblahblahpbt—whatever you are, whatever you've achieved or left undone, you're pretty much just an average person like the rest of us. A snowflake who is, soon enough, going to melt. Stuck right here. Not in the middle of it all, but enough in the middle of something that's clearly going on.

Being honest with yourself is often disappointing, usually overwhelming, and filled with plenty of fear. It's also sometimes wonderful, strangely consistent, and filled with plenty of inspiration. This isn't because you're special. It's because everything else is perfectly normal. Except for the bad parts. Those are **im**perfectly normal.

But before we get to that, and to its **supra**normal solution, we need to start back at the borders of the picture, where there is you. And then, waaaaay over there . . . is God.



PART ONE

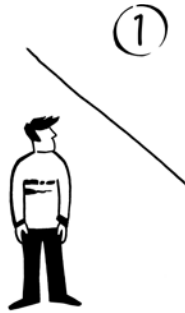
THE TEN
IMPORTANT
THINGS
ABOUT BEING
CREATION

*The fear of the LORD is the
beginning of knowledge.*

Proverbs 1:7

THE FIRST THING

There Is a God



This is the First Important Thing about *Being Creation*. It seems sort of obvious on the surface, but don't let the stick figure drawing above fool you into thinking this Important Thing is simple. This stuff isn't obvious to your soul. It isn't childishly simple in your **heart**.

This single important thing, all by itself, makes rocket science a breeze by comparison. It's not that the math of the matter is so terribly hard. Intellectually, the picture on the page above is easy to understand. A child can make sense of it. But deep down, at that nethermost average root of who you are, you don't **believe** it.

This is why, especially if you do believe it, it's worth repeating over and over again. Even if you do believe **there is a God**, even if you accept it, confess it, and teach it, the inmost average-just-like-everyone-else part of you isn't going along for the ride. No matter how much you actually do believe **there is a God**, you still don't want to, because believing there is a God means that **you are not Him**, and that's quite a bit more than your psyche really wants to handle on an average Monday morning.

YOU ARE NOT IN CHARGE

Think back to the last time life didn't go the way you thought that it should. Monday mornings are good for that. But any time or day will do. In fact, the more inane the memory, the better. Just think of the last time you got annoyed. You were frustrated. You got angry. It doesn't matter what caused it or if it was justified. The point is, life didn't go exactly as you planned it, and then what happened next?

On that day, during that moment, you were less than perfectly happy, and the reason you weren't perfectly happy was that for a single moment the world around you gave you an experience that made abundantly clear this obvious fact: **"You are not in charge; You can't control everything. You don't rule the universe. You are not God."** There was nothing you could do about it, and **that** was why you got mad.

There is a God, and you are not Him. Facing that fact, not just intellectually but **spiritually**, really throws the average human off. Nobody wants to believe this. None of us take this sitting down.

It's kind of funny in a way. Here we are, incredibly average not-gods living in a broken world (that we broke) generally managing quite poorly. Then this crazy-actual ALMIGHTY GOD (the one who made both us and this world before we broke it) whispers into the midst of our dark chaos some astonishingly good news: **He is still out there**, and He is so much bigger and better than us that **He can fix everything** we've ruined. Better: He's planning on it. It begins with Him whispering, **"There is a God, and you are not Him."** But then! *If* we believe it at all—and not everyone does—we have the gall to go and assume, *Well, duh! Of course I know that I'm not God. That's obvious. I've known that I'm not God since I was a child. This is child's milk. Give me some meat to chew on. Can't spiritually mature people like me move on to some real truth?*

The First Important Thing: **There is a God**, but you don't believe it.

If only we could just believe it, file it, apply it, and never forget it. If only it were so! Someday we will. But not yet. That day is coming, and looking forward to that day is one of the Five Results of the Gospel. For that reason, like the rest of Christianity's unbroken

truth, it is especially worth repeating again and again: “**There is a God.**” This truth is the source of powerful hope, an infusion of forward-looking confidence that can inspire anyone who looks to it with the ability to stand firm in the midst of whatever dark and evil times they might find themselves.

**Encourage one another
with these words.**

1 Thessalonians 4:18

But that hope will always be undermined bit by bit by thinking that you’ve mastered the First Important Thing about Being Creation. Just because something is theoretically obvious after one sitting does not mean it’s equally obvious to your **heart**.

FUNDAMENTALS NEVER DIE

Think of it like learning the most basic forms of swordplay. A novice, once gaining a handle on those forms, becomes exponentially more capable on a battlefield than an untrained sluggard swinging his sword like a boy with a stick. But the master is not someone who has graduated from the most basic forms. He is precisely a master **of them**. He never moves beyond them, never discards them, always uses them as the foundation of everything else.

The goal of this book is to get you to that place where you can stand firm, even against your own heart. We’re going to go to battle together and discover the tools for beating down the thorns you find growing there. We’re going to arm you with the firm conviction that expects to find those thorns sprouting new every day, but which does so underneath the unbroken truth that is equally as new every morning. That Echo is far greater than both you and your heart combined.

This means that there are a number of things this book will not be. This book is not an apologetic for the unbeliever. This is not a book for answering skeptics. We’re not trying to answer every broken accusation being blabbered about the world these days.

“You can’t prove that there is a God!”

“All gods are the same god.”

“I’m spiritual not religious (and that means I’m better than you).”

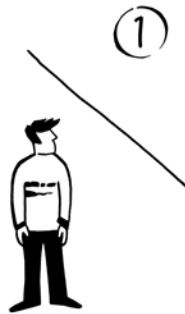
Not everyone who echoes these irreverent claims does so out of malice or with cruel intention. Those who bring up such objections deserve to be cordially heard, taken seriously, and answered

with care. But this book will not be the place for that. This is a book for empowering Christians of goodwill. It is a whetstone for Christians who can tell that the sword of their religion is growing dull and want to find the everlasting way to sharpen it again. I have one goal here: to invest you with confidence that you can

**The fool says in his heart,
“There is no God.”** Psalm 14:1

know and understand the nucleus of Christianity in its entirety. No fluff. No frills. Just clarity. Substantiality. The core distilled down to its fundamental essence. Subtract the distraction. Multiply the understanding, and be certain that this will exponentially increase the trust, the tenacity, and the unbreakable will to echo it again yourself.

HALF TRUTHS ARE TOTAL LIES



Christianity starts and finishes with the fact that **there is a God, and you are not Him**. Believing this truth is no simple idea. It can't just be picked up or discarded at will. It is so profound that no matter how well you might know it, you must also know that you don't believe it well enough.

All the other spiritualities out there rattling about the world are also echoes, but they echo the opposite of this unbroken truth. They echo the broken lie: the Ever-Lie. Some religions are built on rage and attack. Others float like butterflies on the breeze of stretching exercises and oxygen highs. But all of them root and twist their way back to the Ever-Lie so that the little line between average you and the almighty God isn't nearly so definite as the one in our picture. Atheism to Eastern mysticism, the New Age to Mormonism, crass paganism to those that bear the name "Christianity" but are not—all these on the surface appear to be diverse theories about who God is and how to get to Him. "*I am*

God” is not something that many religions are honest enough to teach out loud, although a few do. But at their core, they are all teachings about how to get **to** God, how to be **like** God, how to **join** God, how to be on God’s level. Every time, they blur that little line, which is all the encouragement your heart needs to start believing that it isn’t really there.

The Muslim imam would never claim to be God. But his average human heart, just like yours and mine, has no problem using his religion’s rules and statutes to his own personal advantage, to get what he wants out of life, to live every day as if he were *almost* God anyway. The average human just wants to feel in control. He doesn’t have to openly introduce himself to his friends as “God” to achieve that. He just has to have enough power to be able to act like he is God when he wants to, to be able to make what’s around him submit to his will.

Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.” Genesis 11:4

MY WILL IS WHAT I WANT

Internal subterfuge, self-distraction, and the appetite for half-truth are all far more effective than the open lies, and man is always best deceived by the lies he wants to tell himself. There is nothing harder about Christianity than learning to be honest with the thoughts inside your head and the emotions inside your heart. Not the ones that you like to pretend are there. The ones that are really there. The ones you don’t want to admit even to yourself. Being upset, moment by moment, about being “not God” is one of those thoughts. In fact, the louder you dispute it, the more likely it is to be true. The more you claim that you really love God and would never put yourself above Him, the more likely it is that every time the world doesn’t say to you, “*Thy will be done,*” every time the world instead says, “*You are not God. Deal with it,*” your heart’s regular, average, thorny response is, “*Oh yeah? Just watch me **make** it so!*” If you’re truly immersed, you’ll even convince yourself that you’re doing it **for** God.

This average, everyday spiritual war happens all day long inside every single human life on this planet. Nobody is special. We all wake up with the same needs. Whether you wash your face, drink your coffee, or eat leftover cold pizza, **you spend every moment**

For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ROMANS 1:21

doing whatever it is you believe you need to do in order to take the world you've been given and make it the place you'd rather have it be. All the way along, right there with you, hanging on your neck, is a very wretched, very disgruntled, very self-absorbed, dirty old man. He's got yellow teeth (just a few), a soiled white T-shirt, and a

squinty eye. Each time you do something, anything, everything, he pulls on the thorns growing out of your heart, hanging onto them with all his might until the tremors he starts in there ripple up to your head, where they convince you that what's going on inside your own gut is the only thing that matters. It's usually far more subconscious than intentional, but the question he echoes is the creed of all the little wannabe gods struggling about this dirty earth: "*What about Me? What about Me? What about Me?*"

"Me might not be Almighty. But Me is important. More important than them. More important than Him, too, when it comes down to it. Of course, Me is not physically everything, but Me is spiritually everything. Even if Me isn't God, Me should be God. Even if Me isn't God, Me will act like I am God anyway."

ME SPOTTING

The First Important Thing about Being Creation is learning how to spot this *Me* inside you. *Me* is always right there with you, but even after you've become a Christian, *Me* will never be one. *Me* is your thorns, your own personal bedeviling, that thing the Bible calls **sin**.

Even in the most committed of Christians, truly saved, truly believing, ardently praying, "Thy will be done," *Me* will never stop trying to drag you back down into yourself, where *Me* can rule as your own god again.

Christianity does not unleash you from this thorny experience. Christianity gives you the confidence, conviction, and trust to be honest about it, to admit it for what it is. It takes a Christian to believe that every time you do wrong, *Me* is the reason you **wanted to**. It takes a Christian to believe that the thorns in your heart and the old man around your neck are not somebody else's problem, but the all-too-average spiritual condition of both you and all the other *Mes* who have ever lived.

The First Important Thing is **there is a God**. This is the last thing any of us actually wants to believe. It takes a Christian to believe that **there is a God**. It takes a Christian to believe that this First Important Thing about Being Creation is not nearly so simple as it may first appear. It takes a Christian to insist the sad history of all humanly derived spiritualities is that of the blind leading the blind, the story of an endless stream of leprous souls waging a recalcitrant war against the most obvious unbroken truth that ever was or could be. Your old man, your thorns, your *Me*, stands devoted to its own endless spew of broken lies, always asking the most natural, average, boring, evil question in the world: "*What's in it for Me?*" But the power of Christianity is born in its honesty to admit that this is the heart of our problem.

THE FIRST THING IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF EVERYTHING

The Christian never stops training with the Echo, never stops practicing it, never puts it down. Like the good swordsman, the Christian knows that every flourish, parry, attack, and final strike finds its root in the fundamental forms. The master of his art is not the one who can dazzle his enemy with the most complicated moves, but the one who in the deep heat of battle is readied to rely

**We know that our old self
was crucified with Him in
order that the body of sin
might be brought to nothing,
so that we would no longer
be enslaved to sin.** Romans 6:6

**Without faith it is impossible
to please Him, for whoever
would draw near to God must
believe that He exists.** Hebrews 11:6