

My Thoughts on “The Chosen”

By Dan Jensen (2023)

(In order to fully benefit from this essay, I recommend reading through my “works for beginners” first. They can be found on my website.)

“The Chosen (TC)” is a very popular Christian show right now. Because of this, I am often asked my thoughts on the show and so I thought I would provide this essay for those interested. Before I really dive into things, let me first explain or remind people of where I stand on certain issues that I think will help clarify why I take the position I do regarding the show.

First, I do not believe that the Bible condemns making images of God. I do believe that the Bible fiercely condemns worshiping these images, using them in church services, ever getting carried away with them, failing to explain that we can never make an image of the actual being of God, failing to explain that all of these images are imperfect and are going to inevitably to one degree or another reflect the bias of the artist, or failing to do one’s level best to make the images as culturally accurate as possible. Second, I am a firm believer in the cultural importance of Christian media and entertainment. When I was first saved I longed and prayed (along with countless others in the church) to see tremendous improvements in this area and I believe God has in many ways brought this about. I rejoice in this fact. Third, I am a firm believer that very well done Christian entertainment can be an invaluable tool in helping us train up our children in the Lord. Obviously, this entertainment is no substitute for the Scriptures, but I do believe that it can really help bring much of the Bible to life for younger people, especially younger children.

Fourth, I personally enjoy solid and well produced (I fully agree that a lot is very bad) Christian entertainment. I have always loved entertainment since I was a young child. I

inherited this love from (and saw this love modeled for me) my mother, and it showed in me from a young age. But, because most secular entertainment is becoming more and more distasteful to me (and that is putting it mildly), I have found Christian entertainment to be all the more helpful to me when I am trying to wind down from the stresses of life. Fifth, while I abhor in the strongest manner all of the false and evil ecumenism that is so characteristic of the American church today, I am a staunch advocate for true and biblical ecumenism within Christ's true church. I know the first half of my position on this point makes me very unpopular with many in the church, and I know that the second half of my position on this point often earns me the ire and frustration of many (not most despite the stereotype) within my Reformed camp. I still maintain that both halves are required to be biblical on this aspect of the Christian life.

With all of that said, it should come as no surprise to fans of the show (especially those who actually accurately understand all of the controversies surrounding) that I am a massive fan of the work. I absolutely love the show and I am very thankful and grateful to Dallas (Jenkins) for so faithfully and passionately making it. However, I do still have some very real concerns about the show and I do not believe these concerns are merely me nitpicking as the "typical Calvinist." I will address these concerns down the line. Before I do so, I want to first address the objectors and detractors who will inevitably say that I am lacking discernment here.

The first thing I want to say is that I hate misrepresentation. I especially hate it within the church as we are called to avoid it all the more so as Christians. Misrepresentation is a form of slander. And we are not even supposed to slander the demons (read Jude). That should give us tremendous pause as Christians. I am not saying that I have never unintentionally misrepresented any person, organization, or entity. I have and I am sure that I have in other ways of which I am not even currently aware. With that readily admitted, I try to be painstakingly careful to avoid this for the reasons stated above. It greatly saddens me when so many in the church fail so miserably on this front, including some leaders sometimes that I otherwise highly respect.

With the above paragraph firmly in mind, let me be unequivocally clear that most of the allegations that have been brought against Dallas and the show are indeed slanderous. I'm not trying to be harsh, and I'm not saying that most of those bringing these accusations are doing so dishonestly or intentionally, but their lack of care and precision here is still a form of slander, like it or not. Dallas is not a closet Mormon (normally I would use the term *LDS*, but I do not do so here because usually the accusation is used with the other term). The show does not have Jesus quoting from the Book of Mormon. The show is not compromising with the LGBT+ worldview. The show is certainly not overtly Reformed, and I do have some doctrinal quibbles with it that I will address down the line, but it neither teaches or advocates any heresy (either implicitly or explicitly).

Dallas from every piece of reasonable data that we have, seems to be a sincere and fervent orthodox Bible-believing Christian. Thus, we have no right not to accept him as such. He seems to have a clear and deep heart for the lost. I am not going to thoroughly document all of this here, but I strongly encourage any detractors to actually watch the many responses and interviews that Dallas has given on each of these issues. Not only does he defend himself well in these interviews, he often provides objective evidence for his case, something that is almost always lacking from the detractors (most of the evidence is highly subjective and loosely inferential). Almost all of this information can easily be found on YT, from both Dallas and the detractors. Now, if you have a more substantive objection based on the traditional Reformed understanding of images of Jesus, I do not quibble with you. My pastor, whom I have more respect for than almost anyone on the planet, is a very strong believer in the old-school position. I merely disagree with that position and for that reason I cannot object to the show on those grounds.

With all of that made clear, I have been deeply concerned about certain things. Not to the point where I can no longer in good conscience watch the show or recommend it to others, but items that nonetheless disturb me, give me pause, and at times really frustrate me. And anyone who wants to accuse me of only being mostly positive about the show up until this point so that I can then better clock Dallas and the show, should

remember that if my goal was to deter people from watching the show, I would certainly not turn right around and say how much I love the show and recommend it to others (especially Christian children)! So, yeah sorry, that objection doesn't fly my friend. These are real and genuine concerns of mine.

The first concern I have is the LDS connection. And this connection is real whether anyone wants to accept this or not. This is not a contradiction to what I said above. This connection has led to some erroneously coming to some of the false conclusions discussed above, and Dallas does bear some responsibility for this, but those conclusions are still incorrect at the end of the day. Angel has deep connections to the LDS Church. A great deal of the show is filmed on LDS property. Dallas has repeatedly defended his LDS friends, co-workers, and business partners as either being Christians or very probably being Christians. At the beginning stages of the show's release, he often went on LDS podcasts and acted like LDS folks are fully Christian. As someone who has tons of LDS family, who grew up for many years around the LDS, who now lives around thousands of them, and has witnessed to them faithfully for almost 25 years now, I not only find all of this deeply saddening, but woefully frustrating. Dallas seems like an amazingly godly man. Far more godly than I am and I am not just saying that. However, he does often seem to really lack discernment, especially on this issue.

I don't have a problem with Dallas hiring unbelievers. I don't have any problem with him working with unbelievers. As he has rightfully pointed out many times, TC is not a church. It is not an explicitly Christian organization. Dallas is simply trying to use the show to further the kingdom of God. This is why I believe that the whole tiny pride flag of one of the employees on his own personal gear was a big non-scandal. I appreciate that Dallas is showing love to that community and representing us well. That community believes that we are all haters and we need to do better on that front without compromising. Dallas, in my estimation, seems to be doing this very well and I am grateful to him for that fact.

Yet, it is all of the other issues regarding the connection with the LDS Church that makes all the hiring and partnering and defending very troubling to me and others. I understand that Dallas has complete creative control, and this is why I can still in good conscience enjoy the show immensely and recommend it to others in the church. But, I worry a great deal that one of the primary reasons Dallas has been so defensive about his LDS friends and colleagues is precisely because he and the show are so tightly bound up together with the LDS religion. I think it makes it very hard for Dallas to just say what he needs to say about the LDS faith. I am not saying that Dallas is being dishonest when he gives these defenses. I am saying that because of what I just said above, I think he has convinced himself that these defenses are in fact true. And I think it causes him to refuse to actually do the hard work of trying to fully understand the theology, practice, and history of this very wicked religion that happens to be filled to the brim with some of the nicest people on earth.

Because of a great deal of similar criticism from others in the church, Dallas has thankfully been more clear and biblical in many of his statements and clarifications as the show has progressed. However, he still regularly displays a shocking level of naivety regarding how LDS people use theological language. I could give many examples of this, but in one interview with Stuckey he talks about how many of his LDS friends say that they believe that Jesus is God and that they believe in John 1. He was careful to clarify that he disagrees with the actual LDS version of “Jesus,” but that he is not going to tell his LDS friends what to believe and what not to believe.

His implication was that many of them are probably true Christians *in spite* of their religious affiliation. I understand that Dallas lives in a part of the country where there are not a lot of LDS folks. I understand that he lives in a part of the country where that religion has little to no cultural influence. Hence, if Dallas was just a regular Joe who was talking about a random co-worker he had just met and said many of these things, he could be forgiven for his lack of knowledge on the subject. But, Dallas has been pleaded with many times by genuine friends in the church to better understand this

subject because of his position and the clear connection the show has to the LDS world. And it seems to me, regrettably, that he is still willfully refusing to do this.

Dallas does not understand that many LDS people will use the term “*god*” as an adjective and not as a noun. They are often using it more in the sense of “godlike.” They believe that “Jesus” has achieved “godhood” and thus this usage makes perfect sense. But, they will often be very careful not to make this clear to their Christian friends. So, they will say that they believe that “Jesus” is “god” and many Christians are like, “Wait what? I thought for sure you guys didn’t believe that.” And the LDS person will often respond by gently saying that they are often misunderstood and misrepresented. This inevitably garners a great deal of sympathy from the true Evangelical who only knows all too well how often we are misrepresented and slandered by the culture around us.

Now, I am in no way saying that all LDS people are being implicitly dishonest when they speak this way. Many are indeed *very* confused about what their Church actually teaches. Many are merely parroting what friends, bishops, and parents have taught them or told them. What Dallas fails to understand is that in such cases he is duty bound to take them to the official LDS website and show them what their Church/religion actually officially teaches. If this person is truly a Christian, filled with the Holy Spirit, he or she will be convicted and will begin the process of leaving the LDS Church. I am not saying that this process has to happen in a moment. It can take some time. However, that process will begin at that point. What Dallas fails to understand is that usually when this is done, the person only doubles down and shows that his or her true allegiance is to the LDS Church and not to the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust me when I say that I know this from years and years of experience. And *anyone* else who has been ministering to the LDS for any serious length of time, who is an orthodox believer, will confirm what I have just laid out here.

But Dallas is so tied to a great deal of the LDS world, especially through Angel, that I think he has boxed himself in and is going to find it very, very difficult to be as clear and as forceful on this issue as he is required to be from a biblical standpoint. I understand

fully that many Christian projects have to work under the umbrella of organizations that are not Christian. Usually though, these organizations are made up of leadership that is a mix of Atheist, Catholic, Liberal Protestant, etc. There is usually not one dominant worldview over the entire leadership, even if the leadership as a whole is pretty secular. And often, despite the secularism, the leadership is usually very capitalistic and therefore usually has no problem with the Christian creators saying things that personally annoy them if it is going to help the bottom line.

Angel is a different story. The LDS connection there is far more tight and overt. Further, it is clear that capitalistic concerns are not at the forefront of their agenda. I really do worry that this tension is going to boil over with many of the Christian creators at some point. It may not be with Dallas, but I think at some point some of the Christian creators are going to become uncomfortable with overly defending the LDS and I wonder what will happen at that point. Even more worrisome, is that the creators will probably only become more and more compromised on this issue as Dallas has done and that is terribly problematic.

What Dallas, and I would venture to bet most of the Christian creators, don't understand is how hard the LDS Church has tried for the past 20-30 years to be seen as more mainstream, both by American culture at large, and with Conservative Evangelicals in particular. And Dallas and these Christian creators working with Angel are feeding that goal whether they realize it or not. I feel very confident that Dallas has no idea how much more difficult he has made our task of witnessing to those in the LDS Church. I understand completely that this was never his intent. But, intent and results are often two very different realities in life.

TC is very popular with the LDS population. I can absolutely personally attest to this. The show is on BYUtv and this only makes LDS people feel all the more confident that the show is not going to go against their values. When many of them hear about the Evangelical/LDS partnership, they (for the most part) rejoice in the fact that "Christians" are finally coming together. Don't get me wrong. They still adamantly believe that the

LDS Church is the one true church on earth today. But, they believe that Evangelicals are “Christians” and merely do not understand the fullness of “god’s” truth. Hence, when those of us who are still faithfully trying to reach them preach the gospel to them, they only feel all the stronger that we are just a bunch of dinosaur Evangelicals that can’t give up the controversies of the past. I’m sorry my friends, this is a travesty and it is evil. I’m not saying that Dallas and many others are intentionally engaging in evil here. But, it is evil nonetheless.

I have had many friendly conversations with fellow believers and fans of the show over this point. And I have repeatedly been told that all of this is simply an evangelistic effort by Dallas and many of the others who are very involved in the making of the show. They say that they rejoice that the show is on BYUtv. Isn’t it great that the gospel is being taken into the lion’s den?! Again though, this displays a remarkable amount of ignorance and naivety. If TC were being broadcast on Islamic outlets, that would truly be something amazing and to rejoice over. Muslims do not believe that Jesus was crucified, and thus the show could not help but make many of them take stock of what they believe. But Dallas, by his own admission, is not going to get terribly theological in the show. And I don’t blame him for that point in itself. Often these shows are intended to pique the interest of those who would not normally read the Scriptures. If these shows become too theological, it will defeat that purpose. The goal is to get people thinking in the hopes that they will then begin to read the Bible, at which point they will be far more open and softened to what it has to say about very difficult theological matters.

The problem with the argument that the same is going to be true for the LDS viewers is precisely the fact that it isn’t the same, and it isn’t going to be. Trust me. And again, you can ask others who have been reaching out to the LDS for decades as well and they will wholeheartedly concur with my assessment here. Most LDS people tend to be fairly confused and somewhat shallow theologically speaking. However, almost all of them, especially those raised in the Church, know most of the basic Bible stories by heart. This is especially true concerning the ministry of Christ. They were taught these stories,

both at home and in the Church, from the time they could talk. Hence, TC is going to appeal to them for bringing these stories to life the same way that the show appeals to us. But, for the most part, it is not going to prompt them to open up the Bible. They will only continue to interpret these stories through the lens of whatever LDS theology they already know and understand. And on the rare occasions where the show does get slightly theological, like in the last episode of season 1 where Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well that it's no longer going to be all about temples (something that assuredly rubs LDS people the wrong way), they will just chalk that up to silly Evangelical misunderstanding. I'm telling you, the show is not going to help in evangelizing LDS folks. It only makes it much, much harder for all of the reasons I have stated.

The next concern I have is that Dallas really seems to have an unbiblical aversion to the concept of heresy. It very much shows in his interviews and you can see strong hints of it throughout the show. This makes this concern distinct from my previous one, but still highly related to it (the connection with the LDS world). I think it is this aversion that causes him to want to distance himself from our past history as Evangelicals in very openly and explicitly speaking out against the LDS Church. With that said, I do believe this aversion bleeds out into other areas with Dallas as well. He also seems loath to say that Roman Catholics need the gospel. I understand that this is a far lesser and far more common sin in the church today. Hence, I am not trying to single out Dallas here. That doesn't change the fact that this sin is still sin and is causing huge problems in the church. It is one of the reasons why so many otherwise very godly people like Dallas are more and more compromising with our LDS friends and neighbors. As soon as you start to no longer take heresy seriously, the more you are going to want to accept almost anyone that claims to be "Christian."

I don't have any problem with Roumie playing Jesus. In fact, he is hands down the best version of Jesus I have ever seen on screen or otherwise. But, from many strands of evidence, it certainly seems that Dallas sees Roumie and others as his brothers and sisters in Christ. That is a horrific compromise of the gospel. You can get defensive

about that all you want with me, but read Gal 1. Those are God's words. You have to decide if you fully believe them or not.

Ok, at this point many of you are probably like, "Man, with all of those problems, I am not sure if I should continue to watch the show!" You will have to prayerfully decide that for yourself. The reason I still enjoy and recommend the show is because there is no such thing as perfection in the church. Almost every ministry or Christian project out there has elements to it that cause me to shake my head. And in case that sounds super judgmental, I fully understand that most Christians have very serious issues with my Confessional Presbyterianism. And that is fine, I appreciate Christians having convictions. But, just as I would hope that most Christians could still benefit from my ministry despite those strong apprehensions, I too seek to enjoy all that the body of Christ has to offer. I believe that Christian unity demands this. The fact remains that the show taken in itself is a superbly produced biblical show. Therefore, I have the hardest time saying that the church should not benefit from it. And I do believe that it also can be used as a very effective witnessing tool to many unbelievers (just not so much to the LDS). Thus, I am very hesitant to say that we should not support the show across the board. For now, I am very content to enjoy and recommend the show (praying for Dallas and it along the way), while still voicing my very, very real concerns.