

“To understand and address the many issues of our cultural moment, from abortion to racial injustice, we’ve got to start with the *imago Dei*. *The Dignity Revolution* helps us recover this biblical concept, pushing and pleading with us to apply it constantly and consistently.”

Matt Chandler, Lead Pastor of Teaching, the Village Church, Flower Mound, Texas; President, Acts29; Author, *Take Heart*

“For years I thought that only the lives of elderly and medically fragile people were under assault—it’s what happens in a culture that insists you are ‘better off dead than disabled.’ Now, however, the human dignity of families living on every cul-de-sac in America is under attack as the very definition of ‘human being’ is altered. No longer is this an academic issue; its impact is creeping into hospitals, schools, and businesses and our country is reeling. Daniel Darling’s new book *The Dignity Revolution* is a must-read for every Christian looking for a solid language and good argument to halt the further dismantling of the sanctity of all human life. I highly recommend it!”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends International Disability Center

“We need a revolution in our country of committed followers of Jesus who are consistently living out the value of human dignity in how we speak, act, think, and relate to one another. I’m grateful this timely book offers us a way forward in having a consistent pro-life public witness that will have enduring impact on the church and society at large.”

Jenny Yang, Vice President of Advocacy and Policy, World Relief

“Twenty-five years from now, if evangelical Christians are known for their promotion of human dignity, their love of neighbor, and their commitment to justice and mercy, the compelling vision of Dan Darling’s *The Dignity Revolution* will be the reason why. This book belongs on the bookshelf of every serious American Christian.”

Bruce Ashford, Provost, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Americans are longing for a vision of politics and public life that is grounded in principle, not partisanship, and Christianity demands such a vision. My friend Dan Darling offers such a vision here, grounded in the dignity of each and every human being as made in the image of God. Consider this book carefully, and then act to implement its vision in your personal and public life.”

Michael Wear, Author, *Reclaiming Hope: Lessons Learned in the Obama White House About the Future of Faith in America*

“The kingdom of God redefines for us who matters and what matters. Human beings are not the sum of their physical, economic, and mental powers. We are creatures who reflect, all of us, a picture of the Creator God. I know of no one who cares for human dignity more than my friend and colleague Daniel Darling. This book appeals to the imagination and the conscience about what it would look like were we to treat our neighbors, and ourselves, as created in the image of God.”

Russell Moore, President, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission; Author, *Onward*

“*The Dignity Revolution* is a terrific introduction to thinking Christianly about pressing social issues of our day, including abortion and euthanasia, race and immigration, poverty and justice systems, sexuality and marriage. If you or your millennial children are wondering whether evangelicals in the public sphere have anything to offer besides interest-group politics, read this book.”

Dr. Marvin Olasky, Editor-in-chief, *World Magazine*

“If there’s a revolution I’d like to join, it’s this one! God calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves—and Dan Darling’s book will assist us in that commandment. *The Dignity Revolution* will equip, challenge, and inspire readers to see people as God does. Thank you, Dan, for writing this timeless and important book—may we all have ears to hear.”

Trillia Newbell, Author, *United and God’s Very Good Idea*

“The spirit of the day has proclaimed itself compassionate while failing to recognize the dignity of every person in every condition, under every circumstance. *The Dignity Revolution* details how the Christian doctrine of human dignity must guide our public engagement. Darling compels us not to be merely pious bystanders, but also vigilant servants determined to put our convictions into action on issues such as criminal justice, immigration, and religious liberty.”

Justin E. Giboney, President, the AND Campaign

“This may be one of the most important books of our time. This isn’t a book to merely be read—this is an igniting catalyst of a desperately needed revolution that could turn everything around for every single one of us and this whole brokenhearted world.”

Ann Voskamp, *New York Times* bestselling author, *One Thousand Gifts*

“This book should be on the shelf of anyone wanting to seriously engage the most difficult topics and conversations of our day. Not only will it inform and equip you, but it will give you confidence in how Christians should respond to society’s most difficult conversations.”

Gabe Lyons, Founder, Q Forum; Author, *unChristian* and *The Next Christians*

“We live in an age of mass confusion about what it means to be human. Our dignity is repeatedly attacked by new worldviews which undermine the significance of human beings. This book is a compelling and careful articulation of human dignity according to Scripture. *The Dignity Revolution* carefully traces the worth of human endeavors and articulates a compelling vision for what it means to bear God’s image. Darling is a faithful guide on these issues and this book is a welcome resource for the church.”

Dr. Albert Mohler, President, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Daniel Darling has provided us with an accessible, faithful, understanding, Christ-centered guide to some of the most pressing ethical issues facing us today. Our God-given dignity is good news for each one of us, and this book shows us why.”

Sam Allberry, speaker for Ravi Zacharias International Ministries; Author, *Is God Anti-Gay?* and *Seven Myths About Singleness*

“In our current ‘hashtag age’—where virtues such as kindness, civility, and love are in decline—a new vocabulary and tone around the glory and worth of all persons is sorely needed. In this helpful volume, Daniel does a lovely job of championing such a vocabulary and tone. I commend *The Dignity Revolution* to you... it will be well worth your time.”

Scott Sauls, Senior Pastor, Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee; Author, *Jesus Outside the Lines* and *Befriend*

“You would think that by now we would appreciate the value of these two words: human dignity. But the daily news reminds us otherwise. And Dan Darling reminds us of the urgency of understanding the phrase in its rich biblical dimensions, and, most importantly, of living out the reality that every person on the planet is of immense value.”

Mark Galli, Editor-in-chief, *Christianity Today*

“I think most Christians could tell you that humans are made *imago Dei*—in God’s image and likeness—but I don’t think many fully grasp what that means or how to apply this fundamental idea to our most pressing cultural concerns. This is tragic, because it is precisely here that Christians have so much to offer a confused world right now. This book is overdue and crucial, and should be required reading for all of us.”

John Stonestreet, President, the Colson Center
for Christian Worldview

“The most important question of contemporary ethics, and perhaps of culture itself, is whether the dignity of the person can be grounded in something other than arbitrary exertions of power. Significantly, this question arises at a time of unprecedented frustration with a binary left/right political imagination left over from the culture-war fought by my students’ grandparents. Darling’s book shows how Christians can avoid the idolatry of left/right-style secular politics, while beautifully grounding the dignity of the person in ways which can claim the conscience of the Christian and attract the attention of the curious non-believer.”

Charlie Camosy, Associate Professor of Theological and Social
Ethics, Fordham University; Board Member, Democrats for Life

“Across all spectrums, human dignity is a flag Christians wave. It is central to our identity and mission. Standing athwart our polarized age, *The Dignity Revolution* points to the common ground we share and the broader mission we pursue.”

Chris Horst, Vice President, Hope International

“The journey of life is the story of people bearing the image of God. With the gospel always present, Dan Darling challenges us in *The Dignity Revolution* to see the many roads human dignity travels, and to consider how consistent we are in respecting the sacred image God created us to possess. It is a challenge well worth taking on as we seek to reflect and honor God with how we live as Christians.”

Darrell Bock, Executive Director for Cultural Engagement,
Howard G. Hendricks Center

“For many Christians, today’s politics is deeply unsatisfying. One side cares about the unborn, but not about refugees. The other side cares about immigrants, but not the unborn child. Daniel Darling is leading a quiet revolution that transcends the old left-versus-right paradigm and, instead, summons us to consistently defend human dignity.”

Matt K. Lewis, Senior Columnist, *The Daily Beast*;
CNN Political Commentator

DANIEL DARLING

THE DIGNITY REVOLUTION

RECLAIMING GOD'S RICH
VISION FOR HUMANITY

The logo features a stylized, light gray graphic of an open book or wings above the text.
the goodbook
COMPANY

*This book is dedicated to the most vulnerable among us,
in places nobody sees,
ignored by the masses of people walking by,
ignorant of their plight.*

*God, who formed you in his image,
sees you and loves you.*

The Dignity Revolution: Reclaiming the Bible's Rich Vision for Humanity
© Daniel Darling, 2018.

Published by:
The Good Book Company

Email (US): info@thegoodbook.com
Email (UK): info@thegoodbook.co.uk

Websites:
North America: www.thegoodbook.com
UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk
Australia: www.thegoodbook.com.au
New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz



Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. Except as may be permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher.

ISBN: 9781784982836 | Printed in the UK

Design by André Parker

CONTENTS

Foreword *by Rich Stearns* 9

Introduction: A Person's a Person 13

SECTION ONE: FINDING DIGNITY

1: With Glory and Honor 19

2: Losing our Humanity 31

3: Dignity Rediscovered 47

SECTION TWO: CONTENDING FOR DIGNITY

4: I Am a Man
Race and the Nations 63

5: The Littlest People
The Start of Life 79

6: Frenemies
Justice Systems, Prison, and Immigration 97

7: Facing the Final Foe
Death, Disease, and Healthcare 115

8: Good Work
Work and Poverty 131

9: The Better Story
Identity, Sexuality, and Marriage 149

10: I Am Not My Avatar	
<i>Technology and our Digital Age</i>	167
11: Agree to Disagree	
<i>Pluralism, the State, and Religious Liberty</i>	183
12: A Land Beyond Left and Right	
<i>Politics</i>	201
Outro: Learning From the Zong	
<i>What Will be Our Legacy?</i>	215
Acknowledgments	221

FOREWORD

Every year, *Forbes* magazine releases a list of the world's billionaires—uber-wealthy people ranked by their net worth. When someone soars to the top due to a lucrative sale or stock spike, it makes headlines. News about the rich getting richer is clickbait in our culture.

Wealth is a primary measure of worth in the West, but there are others: celebrity status, physical beauty, political power, athletic accomplishments, citizenship, social-media influence. We live in a world that places price tags on people. Wealthy, successful, powerful people are highly valued. Poor, homeless, powerless people are not.

God's people don't see these price tags, right? If that were so, Dan Darling wouldn't need to write this book. But it isn't so. Basic human dignity is floundering in our status-seeking, increasingly nationalistic world, and Christians are not immune.

Stereotyping people in ways that diminish them is, of course, nothing new; it has happened throughout history, resulting in the Holocaust, the enslavement of Africans, the internment of Japanese Americans, racial segregation, the Rwandan genocide, the systematic oppression of women... I could go on. In all of these injustices, the church was often either complicit or perhaps just looked the other way.

And what about today? In a recent survey by Barna Research, when Americans were asked if people from other countries enriched our culture, evangelicals were the least

likely of the demographic groups to agree.¹ On the question of whether America should accept refugees in their time of crisis, evangelicals were the least welcoming of all groups, with just 16 percent saying yes.

Clearly this calls for some soul-searching.

CHANGING THE PRICE TAGS

As Christ-followers, we can find our most powerful teaching on human dignity and worth in the life and example of Jesus.

Jesus' actions and associations challenged the status quo and spoke to the value of all people. His inner circle was a motley crew of simple fishermen, a zealot, a tax collector, and women (a cultural and religious taboo). He healed and touched people with skin diseases, lifelong disabilities, and demon possession. He publicly interacted with Samaritans and sinners. And the first person to join him in paradise was a convicted felon—the thief on the cross.

Again and again, Jesus loved the unlovable, touched the untouchable, valued the undervalued, and welcomed the unwanted. He changed the price tags. He crossed out the paltry prices that had been assigned to these people and replaced them with one word: PRICELESS. He saw people as not just worthy of some simple kindness, but so precious that he would pay the ultimate price for each one of them.

Of all Jesus' interactions with the sick and the sinful, I find the brief story of the healing of a leper in Mark chapter 1 most instructive for our times. Mark 1 v 40-42 reads:

A man with leprosy came and knelt in front of Jesus, begging to be healed. "If you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean," he said. Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be

1 barna.com/research/americans-soften-immigration-2017/. Accessed 5/2/18.

healed!” Instantly the leprosy disappeared, and the man was healed. (New Living Translation)

Jesus’ unexpected actions provide three takeaways for us. First, Jesus interacts with this man of the lowest status in society—a person not just diseased and disfigured but untouchable, according to Jewish law and Roman custom. No other religious or civic leader would have stopped to interact with such a person. Jesus was making a clear statement: *Every person—every life—is precious to God.*

Second, we read that Jesus was moved with compassion—not filled with fear, disgust, or judgment. Nor was he influenced by the Pharisees or the political climate. The takeaway for us: *We need to react to all people—especially the marginalized—with love and compassion.*

Third, Jesus not only touched this man—a man who perhaps had not felt a human touch for years—but he saw his pain and said, “I am willing. Be healed.” He not only saw and sympathized with this man who was deemed worthless; he also acted. The lesson for us: *Jesus calls us to reach into the pain and brokenness of our world.* He wants his people to be like firefighters—rushing toward the fire of human suffering instead of away from it.

So who are the lepers today? Be honest with yourself. Are there groups of people whose worth you have, in your perspective of them, reduced or discounted? Refugees, Muslims, undocumented immigrants, people with AIDS, those on welfare, the homeless? More and more, it’s common to devalue people on ideological grounds: If you’re conservative, you reject liberals; if you’re in favor of gun control, you vilify gun owners. When we look at other human beings through the distorting lenses of culture, politics, patriotism, and fear, we fail to see them as God does—made in his own image and of priceless value.

Through God's eyes, all people are fearfully and wonderfully made—precious in his sight. As followers of Jesus Christ, this is the view of humanity we must embrace, so that we respond with compassion to the brokenness in our communities and our world.

Dan's book is timely as we navigate a divisive, politicized climate, both in the US and throughout the Western world. It's imperative now that those of us who follow Jesus reaffirm our biblical vision of human dignity in the face of confusing public discourse. Titling this book a "Dignity Revolution" is no overstatement, for Jesus called us to take the world by storm, like revolutionaries, and to value every human life as priceless. This is what attracted people to Jesus during his time on earth, and it still draws people today.

We will never win the world for Christ if we fail to demonstrate his unconditional love for all people. As the apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5 v 20, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (NLT).

*Richard Stearns, President of World Vision U.S.
and the author of "The Hole in Our Gospel"*

INTRODUCTION

A PERSON'S A PERSON

It was a weekday morning and we packed our four kids into the minivan and rambled down Route 40 toward that venerable Nashville landmark The Grand Ole Opry. We weren't there to see one of our favorite country music artists, but a live production of Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hears a Who*.

To be honest, while the rest of the family was excited, I admit that if my wife hadn't politely asked (ordered) me to take a day off work, I wouldn't have made this entertainment choice. So as we settled into our comfortable chairs at the Opry, I prepared myself to be bored. I thoroughly enjoy theater, but I had low expectations for a production designed to amuse children and, by extension, weary adults. I consoled myself with a fully-charged iPhone, invented for these kinds of situations. My plan was to dim the brightness, read a few online articles I'd bookmarked on my browser, and re-emerge after the play.

I never looked at my iPhone.

I was enraptured by the performance. I'd read the book a few times as a kid and a few more as a parent, but it wasn't until I saw Dr. Seuss's vivid morality tale on stage, under the lights, that its powerful, repeated message grabbed my heart:

"A person's a person, no matter how small."

When I heard this phrase, I sat straight up. It was so simple, so obvious, and so compelling. “Yes,” I thought, “every person really is a... person, no matter what their usefulness to society, no matter how seemingly insignificant they are, no matter what their stature.”

A person's a person. What a thought for our strange and confused age.

DR. SEUSS AND THE A-BOMB

Curious, I researched (later, of course, with my iPhone firmly in my pocket) the origins of *Horton Hears a Who*. I discovered that Theodore Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss, wrote this children's book after he took a tour of Japan in 1953. It was an eye-opening journey for the author. During World War II, Geisel had used his creative gifts to rally America to the Allied cause. His pro-America cartoons were a fixture in newspapers and magazines across the country. Geisel was a steadfast supporter of President Franklin Roosevelt and the fight for freedom against the fascism of Germany, Japan, and Italy.

But Geisel's work went beyond patriotism. In his cartoons, he presented Japanese people as less than human. His illustrations helped stoke an ugly anti-Japanese sentiment in the US, at a time when Japanese-Americans were ordered to evacuate their homes and were interned in camps. I googled some of his old wartime images and was shocked at the way his work dehumanized Japanese Americans. Geisel's work was tinder for the fires of racial resentment. But when the artist visited Japan and met survivors of the devastating atomic bombs that rained down on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, on many tens of thousands of Japanese people, something changed inside him. He saw humanity in people he had once considered subhuman.

And so, when he returned to America, Geisel apologized

in the clearest way he knew how. He wrote a children's book: *Horton Hears a Who*.

Though he was raised Lutheran, there isn't much in Geisel's life to indicate genuine faith in Christ. The ethic he presented in Horton, however, borrows from the beautiful Christian idea that every single human life has dignity. This was what Geisel had come to realize, too late for him to un-draw his cartoons but not too late for him to write this signature line in his book: a person's a person, no matter how small.

RECOVERING DIGNITY

The easy temptation for us is to look back at Theodore Geisel's time and assume we'd behave differently. We know (don't we?) not to dehumanize a whole group of people. We like to write ourselves into history as the heroes, and assure ourselves that we have learned from past mistakes.

But let's not do that too fast. It's always easier to see the blindspots of another culture, and another political position, and another's heart, than it is our own. About what might our grandchildren wonder how we could ever have thought as we do, or lived as we do, or kept quiet as we do?

The truth is that we live in a world of terrible, daily assaults on humans, from war to famine to sexual assault to poverty, from the earliest stages of life to the last. And we're tempted, like people in every era but perhaps more so today, to let our tribal affiliations and cultural prejudices blind us to real human tragedy or, worse, be complicit in the marginalizing of people groups. What's more, advances in technology are challenging our assumptions about what it means to be human.

We need a fresh approach to engaging with the world. I'd like to suggest that this can be found in a recovery of the robust Christian doctrine of human dignity.

Imagine, for a moment, if God's people began to lead a new, quiet revolution whose foundation was a simple premise: every human being—no matter who they are, no matter where they are, no matter what they have done or have had done to them—possesses dignity, because every human being is created in the image of God. By God's grace, our churches would change, and our communities would change.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

This book is for you if you find yourself without any home in the political parties of your nation. It's for you if deep down you feel your positions on important issues are increasingly being shaped not by biblical convictions but by political allegiance. It's for you if you'd like to be involved in helping those who seem vulnerable, or struggling, or broken, but you don't know what to do, or how to do it, or whether it would really make a difference anyway—or you just never get around to it when there's so much else to do.

As you read, at times you will feel validated, and at times you will feel uncomfortable. This is as it should be, for none of God's people are yet perfect, and all of God's people are "sojourners and exiles" till Christ returns to renew and restore all things (1 Peter 2 v 11). But while we await Jesus' coming, we are invited to participate in his mission—to make a difference while we wait. We're to witness to where we're heading and to whom we're heading.

We need a renewed way of interacting with and speaking to the world. We need a human-dignity movement.

This is about more than simple compassion. Human dignity must be at the heart of our Christian lives because it is at the heart of the gospel story. The gospel celebrates a God who both created humanity with purpose and who—when that humanity turned their back on their Creator—rescued humanity through his Son, the divine human

Jesus, in order to recreate and repurpose them. Jesus cared enough about humanity to become a human. The Spirit cares enough about humanity to transform us as humans. And when we ascribe the value to humanity—all humanity—that Jesus did and does, we realize that part of living as a Christian and part of believing as a Christian is to view people the way God views them.

A gospel-saturated human dignity movement unites two seemingly disparate strands of the Christian life. It reminds us that personal salvation without neighbor love is an incomplete gospel, and it reminds us that social justice without individual transformation is powerless. Human dignity is simple, it's compelling... and it's often been ignored. Human dignity is often assumed or downplayed in our books and in our preaching and in our thinking. But part of living as a Christian, part of believing as a Christian, is to view others, and ourselves, as possessing far greater dignity than we naturally think, and to live in a way that is consistent with that view.

This book is not about left or right. It's about seeing the people of the world the way God sees them. This is a book that imagines what it would look like and how our societies could flourish if we moved beyond our intransigent tribal politics or increasingly weary apathy and worked to create societies that are good for our neighbors—all our neighbors. It isn't exhaustive—I haven't included every single area where looking at others in this way makes a difference. But this book will show you what happens in us and what can happen through us if we really do see that a person's a person, no matter how small, or different, or distant.

DO SOMETHING

I'm writing this book not simply for thought leaders and power brokers (though I hope they do read it!). I am writing

for everyday Christians: the faithful followers of Jesus around the world who seek to live their lives, every day, on mission for God. If we're to be faithful stewards in this age in which God has placed us, I'm convinced that we must each understand what it really means to be truly human.

I believe the church is the most powerful institution in the world, the most powerful catalyst for social change, with the most powerful message in existence, because the church is the place where God's Spirit most powerfully dwells. So this book is for pastors and plumbers, columnists and craftsmen, mayors and moms. It's for CEOs and Sunday-school teachers, accountants and astronauts, dynamic speakers and day laborers.

And it's calling us to be engaged.

Remember Theodore Geisel? On his visit to Japan, his eyes were opened to the basic humanity of the people of that country. And on his return to the US, he did something about it. He did what he could. He wrote a kids' book.

God is calling all of us not just to see that people have dignity, but to act accordingly. Not just to know, but to do.

To be fully captured by the Bible's rich vision of human dignity will provoke us to act in different ways. Some will feel the call to run for office... others will roll up their sleeves and join the good work of nonprofit ministry... and others might simply find little ways to incorporate this vision of human dignity into their everyday lives and change their community one word, one action, one person at a time. Each one of us can be, and are called to be, part of this movement—a human dignity revolution that our societies need, and that we—you—are uniquely placed as Christians to join.

Because a person's a person, no matter how small.