When You Can’t Forgive Yourself

“I know that God forgives me, but I can’t forgive myself.”

Lots of people find themselves trapped in self-recriminations, overwhelmed by regret and sorrow for things they have done (or not done). They beat themselves up, often secretly hoping this will make up for their sin. But they can’t get past it.

You can read the Bible from cover to cover and not find a single instruction on forgiving oneself. That’s because it’s not there.

We don’t have the power to forgive ourselves. It’s like trying to separate ourselves from our shadow.

As I understand it, this idea comes from humanistic psychology. For millennia, people have recognized the freedom and beauty that comes from being forgiven and released from bad things we have done. But what do you do when you leave God, the ultimate Forgiver, out of the picture? Either because of not believing in Him, or because of ignoring Him, but you still need forgiveness?

Forgive yourself?

What does that look like? Looking in the mirror and declaring, “OK, I forgive you”? That usually doesn’t work—those are empty words.

We need, instead, to look to the Lord and receive His gift of forgiveness. For every wrong (or even dumb) thing we have ever done, Jesus says, “I died for that. I paid for that with My life.”

The thing about forgiveness is that since we are the image of a just God, our souls cry out for justice, which pretty much

means that in order for things to be made right, “Somebody’s got to PAY!” And Jesus did pay, with His life, on the cross. His last words were, “It is finished—it is paid in full.”

So instead of focusing on forgiving ourselves, we need to focus on Jesus and thank Him for His incredible gift of taking our sin off us and onto Himself. Thank Him over and over, until the truth soaks down deep into our hearts and we own it as true.

For a lot of people, there is a stain of shame that weighs heavy on their heart. They may even embrace the truth that God has forgiven them, but they still *feel* guilty. And that’s why they say, “I guess I just can’t forgive myself.”

First John 1:9 offers us two magnificent promises: If we confess our sins (that means to agree with God that what we did was wrong), He is faithful and just to **forgive** us our sins and **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness. When God forgives us of a sin, He sends it away (that’s what biblical forgiveness means) forever. He takes it off our account and puts it on Jesus’ account. But that’s not all. He also cleanses us with the purifying power of Jesus’ blood, which removes the stain of sin and shame.

But our culture elevates feelings to the level of an idol, and it’s easy for us to say, “Well, that may be what the Bible says, but I’m not feeling it. So it must not be real. Or it’s true for other people but not me.”

If God says it, it’s true. So the way to overcome the faulty thinking and feeling is to repeat (daily is a good plan), “Lord, Your word says that if I confess my sins, and You know I have, You are faithful and just to forgive me and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I thank You for cleansing me even if my feelings haven’t caught up to reality. I choose to receive Your forgiveness and Your cleansing, especially since it cost You Your life, Lord Jesus.”

Repetition is often the key to allowing truth to soak down into our hearts and minds.

But some will still say, “Well, God may forgive me, and maybe Jesus paid for my sin on the cross, but I still just can’t forgive myself.”

Let me reframe what that may mean.

“Well, God may forgive me, but He’s God so He has to. I am clinging to the guilt and shame, and I’m going to keep beating myself up because that’s all I know. I have to pay for it somehow.”

Taking that position is saying, “Jesus, my sin may have cost You Your life, but it wasn’t enough. I have to add to it with self-condemnation. My standard is higher than Yours because I’m that kind of holy.”

Whoa.

In that case, wise people have suggested that instead of focusing on the sin one can’t forgive themselves for, the right next step is to repent of what is actually pride and arrogance before the Lord. As author Randy Alcorn says, refusing to humbly receive God’s forgiveness as enough is “making ourselves and our sins bigger than God and His grace.”

Romans 8:1 is one of the most glorious promises in scripture: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” If God doesn’t condemn us, we have no right to disagree with Him and condemn ourselves.

The bottom line for those who are stuck in not forgiving themselves? Stop trying to do what you can’t. Receive the amazing gift of God’s forgiveness, which cost Him everything, and start thanking Him over and over for setting you free and cleaning you up from the inside out.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/when-you-cant-forgive-yourself/ on Sept. 19, 2023.

Mind Games Camp (radio transcript)

Camp Overview

There's one thing we do here at Probe that is my favorite part of ministry. Our Mind Games Camp is a week-long, total immersion, give-it-all-we've-got experience for high school and college students that changes minds and hearts forever.

Beautiful Camp Copass in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area is surrounded by a lake on three sides and it feels very seclude—even though it's not far from the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport, so students can easily fly in. We teach Christian students how to think biblically on a wide range of subjects: understanding how others think as they understand their worldviews, how they can know that Christianity is true, creation and evolution, human nature, the differences between guys and girls, the problem of

evil and the value of suffering, campus Christianity, and even how to watch a movie with their brain turned on. They learn about a compassionate but biblical view of LGBT, different views of science and Earth-history, and genetic engineering.

Returning campers get to experience what is always a highlight for our students, a special alumni track with new lectures in an intimate, personal setting. The alumni always tell the first-timers what an amazing difference it makes to come back a second or even third time, because they get so much more out of the conference than they ever thought possible.

The Probe teachers don't just give the lectures, though; we continue conversations at meals where we eat and visit with the students instead of each other. We break up into discussion groups to help the students process what they're learning in the sessions. There is free time every afternoon and evening to hike, swim, play basketball or card games, read or nap. Or of course, just hang out with new friends. The students are delighted to meet other thinking Christians from all over the country, students eager to think and grow in their faith as they learn to love God with their minds together. They enjoy getting to know us as the instructors, too. We're not only available the whole week; we look for opportunities to engage in conversations that will encourage and affirm what God is doing in the minds and hearts of these precious young people.

We talk about Mind Games in this article, but you can go to our website, MindGamesCamp.com, and check out our videos, a typical week's schedule, and lots of other information. In the next sections you'll hear a little bit from several instructors, and also from several of our Mind Games alumni.

Sneak Peek of Probe Lectures

Here are snippets from lectures of four of our Probe Mind

Games instructors:

Here's Dr. Ray Bohlin speaking on "Christian Views of Science and Earth History":
So, what are these three views we're going to talk about? Well first, there is the recent, or literal, view, then there's what I call Progressive Creation, then there's what I call Theistic Evolution or what is now, the term now used is Evolutionary Creation. OK . . . so what kind or form of analysis we going to apply here?

Sue Bohlin on "God, Gender and Transgender":
Masculinity reflects the strong Father heart of God, to use His strength to love us by protecting us and providing for us. So I love this idea of the Father heart of God, especially when you have a father wound, because of a father either not being there, or not loving you well, not connecting with you well. So often God our Father says, 'I will be your Father. Come to Me, let Me show you what a father is supposed to be."

Todd Kappelman on "How to Watch a Film":
The Need for Interpretation, Matthew Arnold: this is where we start getting some of our rules that we look at when we look at a film. When interpreting a film, one should ask these following questions: first, number one. How important is life to the director, writers, etc., and are the tough issues dealt with or avoided? This goes to the seriousness of a film. I mean, are we watching a romantic comedy, are we watching a film, drama, of somebody overcoming heroin?

Tom Davis on "The Deity of Christ"
Are all religions basically the same? And we have a law of logic called the law of non-contradiction. To kind of put this in somewhat symbolic terms, A cannot be non-A. You can evaluate the consistencies of things, you can tell if all religions are the same with this law.

Comments from Alumni, Part 1

This week we're talking about our memorable, life-impacting, week-long summer Mind Games Camp. But you don't have to take our word for it. Consider what some of our alumni have to say:

Anna:
Mind Games is a brilliant camp. It has wonderful professors who are very knowledgeable in so many subjects like philosophy and science and theology, and it's so wonderful to get their perspectives on the Bible, and to hear about their spiritual walks, and to hear things that you wouldn't normally hear in your Sunday School class or in church. It's very spiritually enriching not only because of the sessions you'll be going to, but also because of the environment you're in. You're surrounded by like-minded Christians who also love the Lord, so you're with people that can sharpen you as iron sharpens iron. All the sessions have so much information that you can learn things from; they help you with evangelism, they help you with confidence in your own faith, they help you with discipleship. It's so helpful, there's so many things I've learned every single year, I've learned a new thing-so many new things every single year at Mind Games.

Jona:
Looking at the topics, I was terrified because I would be putting myself in a position where I could be wrong, put myself in a position where I challenge all my worldviews, even worse I'll be surrounded by people who are way smarter than me, or have way more experience than me. And what I realized this year is that there is nothing more liberating than being ready to be wrong.

Blaine:
Out of all the events that I've had this year, this was probably one of the ones I looked forward to the most. Last year I had such an great time and made amazing memories and connected with tons of people, and I got to see some of them

this year, and as I was going through the camp I learned a lot more as we dove deeper into the topics and revisited them, and as I grew closer and gained connections with some new people and some alumni, it felt like I was growing closer to a family. And it was just really fun overall.

Comments From Alumni, Part 2

Aiden and Gideon keep coming back because they love it so much!

Aiden:
This is my third year. Every year always blows me out of the water because there is a certain level of connection, a certain level of deepness and humanity that you don't get to see outside of this camp. It's incredible to me just how deep you can get with complete strangers in a week. it's just really powerful to me, that God has blessed this camp, that God has blessed the teachers and the professors (I don't know what you prefer to go by) but like the continuing and consistent level of love and care and just connection is what draws me to this camp and what keeps me coming. And so if I had to say one thing about this camp, that this camp was probably one of the most impactful things in my life

Gideon:
This has been my fourth year attending Mind Games and this has impacted my life so many facets, seen and unseen. It has been a really great experience to get to know people my age, have peers, because in my life I really haven't had very many peers of equal anything it's been more mature and spiritual-and it's been rather difficult just being a person who loves God and striving for more, and this camp has really let me be able to become who I want to be and not just who I would have been. And this camp has really allowed me to become more like Jesus. I truly believe that, and I'm convinced of that.

Why Go to Mind Games?

We now know that three out of four high school seniors who had been part of a church youth group drop out of church within a year.{1} One reason for this is that they don't own their faith; they don't know that Christianity is true, and they don't know why it's true. They tend to equate faith with a warm fuzzy feeling that doesn't stand up to the challenges of life. Many students are afraid to express their doubts so they never learn that there are good, solid answers to their questions. They are sensitive to the disconnect that happens when those who profess to be Christ-followers act no differently from unbelievers.

For over thirty years, Probe's Mind Games conferences have been preparing young people for the challenges to their faith. In that time, we have witnessed firsthand the incredible thirst for a reliable trustworthy faith. Again and again we hear that some had despaired of ever finding something like Mind Games. The conference consistently exceeds expectations, and students often tell us they wish they had brought their friends.

Alumni from these summer conferences have gone on to become leaders on their campuses, the government and the military. This week-long immersion truly changes lives, giving them a new confidence in their God, His Word, and in their role as His ambassadors. We know this because some of them come back as alumni a second or third year, and because they contact us years later and let us know how Mind Games continues to impact them.

Mornings start with an informal devotional by Probe staff and a time of prayer. They receive twenty-five hours of instruction using video clips, role play, Q and A, and other teaching techniques. They connect with each other and process what they're learning in small groups. We as staff get to know and truly love them.

Mind Games Camp is best for those who have finished their junior or senior years of high school, and for college freshmen and sophomores. [Note: especially motivated students younger than that are welcome, though!] Please go to MindGamesCamp.com, and check out videos. You can look at a typical schedule, and find out all the details. And then register someone you love. It will make a difference in time and eternity.

Notes

1. Steve Cable, Is This the Last Christian Generation? probe.org/is-this-the-last-christian-generation/

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What Christmas Smells Like. And Us Too.

Sue Bohlin recently learned something new about biblical anointing oil, and why cinnamon is such a special fragrance.

When you walk into our Tom Thumb grocery store, there's a flower display right inside the door. For weeks, they have had bags of cinnamon-scented pine cones and it smells like Christmas. I love it! The last time I shopped I gave in and bought one of the bags and put in on the hearth in our living room.

I discovered that unfortunately, one little bag with a few pine cones does not a Christmas make. You need a bunch more.

Christmas MUSIC, on the other hand—now, that'll get you in the Christmas spirit! My husband's Christmas music playlist has

been on full blast for weeks. Which includes Handel’s Messiah.

We hear the word “Messiah” a lot more during the ramp-up to Christmas, but do you know what it means? It means “Anointed One.”

In the Old Testament, in Exodus 30:22-33, God gave the formula for a perfumed anointing oil to be used ONLY for sacred things and sacred people. Moses smeared it on the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, and all the pieces of furniture in the holy place. And Aaron and the other priests were anointed with this oil.

It was a fragrance set apart—that’s what “holy” means—from all other fragrances. When people smelled it, they immediately thought of God. They thought, “Oh, that’s what God smells like!”

If I were to ask you, “What does Christmas smell like?” I bet the first thing to come to mind is cinnamon, right?

Well, that was one of the elements of the anointing oil as well.

For many hundreds of years, the people of God used this sacred anointing oil that wordlessly proclaimed, “This is what sacred smells like. This is what God smells like.”

At the same time, they looked for the promised Messiah to come, and Messiah meant “Anointed One.” So the sacred smells of the anointing oil were another signpost pointing to Jesus.

Every time you see or hear the term “Jesus Christ,” you can think “Jesus Messiah,” because “Christ” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for “Anointed One.”

When Jesus came, He showed us what the Father was. He smelled like the Father.

He smelled like God.

And here's the interesting thing. After He went back up to heaven, people started calling His followers "Christ-ians," which means "Little Christs." Little ***anointed ones***.

2 Corinthians 2:15 says, "For we are to God the sweet aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing."

Just as Jesus smelled like God, so do believers in Jesus!

Not literally, but our lives are a fragrant aroma of Christ that point us to God.

We may not smell like Christmas, but smelling like God is even better, don't you think?

(Major thanks to my favorite female theologian, Dr. Nika Spaulding, who shared this insight connecting the dots about anointing, Jesus Messiah, and God-smelling Christians in her Substack teaching on the book of Exodus.)

This blog post originally appeared at on blogs.bible.org/what-christmas-smells-like-and-us-too/, Dec. 23, 2025.

The Value of Suffering: A Christian Perspective

Sue Bohlin looks at suffering from a Christian perspective. Applying a biblical worldview to this difficult subject results in a distinctly different approach to suffering than our natural inclination of blame and self pity.

This article is also available in Spanish.

There is no such thing as pointless pain in the life of the child of God. How this has encouraged and strengthened me in the valleys of suffering and pain! In this essay I'll be discussing the value of suffering, an unhappy non-negotiable of life in a fallen world.

Suffering Prepares Us to Be the Bride of Christ

Among the many reasons God allows us to suffer, this is my personal favorite: it prepares us to be the radiant bride of Christ. The Lord Jesus has a big job to do, changing His ragamuffin church into a glorious bride worthy of the Lamb. Ephesians 5:26-27 tells us He is making us holy by washing us with the Word—presenting us to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. Suffering develops holiness in unholy people. But *getting there* is painful in the Lord's "laundry room." When you use bleach to get rid of stains, it's a harsh process. Getting rid of wrinkles is even more painful: ironing means a combination of heat plus pressure. Ouch! No wonder suffering hurts!

But developing holiness in us is a worthwhile, extremely important goal for the Holy One who is our divine Bridegroom. We learn in Hebrews 12:10 that we are enabled to share in His holiness through the discipline of enduring hardship. More ouch! Fortunately, the same book assures us that discipline is a sign of God's love (Heb. 12:6). Oswald Chambers reminds us that "God has one destined end for mankind—holiness. His one aim is the production of saints."{1}

It's also important for all wives, but most especially the future wife of the Son of God, to have a submissive heart. Suffering makes us more determined to obey God; it teaches us

to be submissive. The psalmist learned this lesson as he wrote in Psalm 119:67: “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.”

The Lord Jesus has His work cut out for Him in purifying us for Himself (Titus 2:14). Let’s face it, left to ourselves we are a dirty, messy, fleshly people, and we desperately need to be made pure. As hurtful as it is, suffering can purify us if we submit to the One who has a loving plan for the pain.

Jesus wants not just a *pure* bride, but a mature one as well—and suffering produces growth and maturity in us. James 1:2-4 reminds us that trials produce perseverance, which makes us mature and complete. And Romans 5:3-4 tells us that we can actually rejoice in our sufferings, because, again, they produce perseverance, which produces character, which produces hope. The Lord is creating for Himself a bride with sterling character, but it’s not much fun getting there. I like something else Oswald Chambers wrote: “Sorrow burns up a great amount of shallowness.”{2}

We usually don’t have much trouble understanding that our Divine Bridegroom loves us; but we can easily forget how much He longs for us to love Him back. Suffering scoops us out, making our hearts bigger so that we can hold more love for Him. It’s all part of a well-planned courtship. He does know what He’s doing . . . we just need to trust Him.

Suffering Allows Us to Minister Comfort to Others Who Suffer

One of the most rewarding reasons that suffering has value is experienced by those who can say with conviction, “I know how you feel. I’ve been in your shoes.” Suffering prepares us to minister comfort to others who suffer.

Feeling isolated is one of the hardest parts of suffering. It

can feel like you're all alone in your pain, and that makes it so much worse. The comfort of those who have known that same pain is inexpressible. It feels like a warm blanket being draped around your soul. But in order for someone to say those powerful words—"I know just how you feel because I've been there"—that person had to walk through the same difficult valley first.

Ray and I lost our first baby when she was born too prematurely to survive. It was the most horrible suffering we've ever known. But losing Becky has enabled me to weep with those who weep with the comforting tears of one who has experienced that deep and awful loss. It's a wound that—by God's grace—has never fully healed so that I can truly empathize with others out of the very real pain I still feel. Talking about my loss puts me in touch with the unhealed part of the grief and loss that will always hurt until I see my daughter again in heaven. One of the most incredibly comforting things we can ever experience is someone else's tears for us. So when I say to a mother or father who has also lost a child, "I hurt with you, because I've lost a precious one too," my tears bring warmth and comfort in a way that someone who has never known that pain cannot offer.

One of the most powerful words of comfort I received when we were grieving our baby's loss was from a friend who said, "Your pain may not be about just you. It may well be about other people, preparing you to minister comfort and hope to someone in your future who will need what you can give them because of what you're going through right now. And if you are faithful to cling to God now, I promise He will use you greatly to comfort others later." That perspective was like a sweet balm to my soul, because it showed me that my suffering was not pointless.

There's another aspect of bringing comfort to those in pain. Those who have suffered tend not to judge others experiencing similar suffering. Not being judged is a great comfort to

those who hurt. When you're in pain, your world narrows down to mere survival, and it's easy for others to judge you for not "following the rules" that should only apply to those whose lives aren't being swallowed by the pain monster.

Suffering often develops compassion and mercy in us. Those who suffer tend to have tender hearts toward others who are in pain. We can comfort others with the comfort that we have received from God (2 Cor. 1:4) because we have experienced the reality of the Holy Spirit being there for us, walking alongside us in our pain. Then we can turn around and walk alongside others in their pain, showing the compassion that our own suffering has produced in us.

Suffering Develops Humble Dependence on God

Marine Corps recruiter Randy Norfleet survived the Oklahoma City bombing despite losing 40 percent of his blood and needing 250 stitches to close his wounds. He never lost consciousness in the ambulance because he was too busy praying prayers of thanksgiving for his survival. When doctors said he would probably lose the sight in his right eye, Mr. Norfleet said, "Losing an eye is a small thing. Whatever brings you closer to God is a blessing. Through all this I've been brought closer to God. I've become more dependent on Him and less on myself."{3}

Suffering is excellent at teaching us humble dependence on God, the only appropriate response to our Creator. Ever since the fall of Adam, we keep forgetting that God created us to depend on Him and not on ourselves. We keep wanting to go our own way, pretending that we are God. Suffering is powerfully able to get us back on track.

Sometimes we hurt so much we can't pray. We are forced to depend on the intercession of the Holy Spirit and the saints, needing them to go before the throne of God on our behalf.

Instead of seeing that inability to pray as a personal failure, we can rejoice that our perception of being totally needy corresponds to the truth that we really are that needy. 2 Corinthians 1:9 tells us that hardships and sufferings happen “so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”

Suffering brings a “one day at a time-ness” to our survival. We get to the point of saying, “Lord, I can only make it through today if You help me . . . if You take me through today . . . or the next hour . . . or the next few minutes.” One of my dearest friends shared with me the prayer from a heart burning with emotional pain: “Papa, I know I can make it through the next fifteen minutes if You hold me and walk me through it.” Suffering has taught my friend the lesson of total, humble dependence on God.

As painful as it is, suffering strips away the distractions of life. It forces us to face the fact that we are powerless to change other people and most situations. The fear that accompanies suffering drives us to the Father like a little kid burying his face in his daddy’s leg. Recognizing our own powerlessness is actually the key to experience real power because we have to acknowledge our dependence on God before His power can flow from His heart into our lives.

The disciples experienced two different storms out on the lake. The Lord’s purpose in both storms was to train them to stop relying on their physical eyes and use their spiritual eyes. He wanted them to grow in trust and dependence on the Father. He allows us to experience storms in our lives for the same purpose: to learn to depend on God.

I love this paraphrase of Romans 8:28: “The Lord may not have planned that this should overtake me, but He has most certainly permitted it. Therefore, though it were an attack of an enemy, by the time it reaches me, it has the Lord’s permission, and therefore all is well. He will make it work

together with all life’s experiences for good.”

Suffering Displays God’s Strength Through Our Weakness

God never wastes suffering, not a scrap of it. He redeems all of it for His glory and our blessing. The classic Scripture for the concept that suffering displays God’s strength through our weakness is found in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, where we learn that God’s grace is sufficient for us, for His power is perfected in weakness. Paul said he delighted in weaknesses, hardships, and difficulties “for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Our culture disdains weakness, but our frailty is a sign of God’s workmanship in us. It gets us closer to what we were created to be—completely dependent on God. Several years ago I realized that instead of despising the fact that polio had left me with a body that was weakened and compromised, susceptible to pain and fatigue, I could choose to rejoice in it. My weakness made me more like a fragile, easily broken window than a solid brick wall. But just as sunlight pours through a window but is blocked by a wall, I discovered that other people could see God’s strength and beauty in me because of the window-like nature of my weakness! Consider how the Lord Jesus was the exact representation of the glory of the Father—I mean, He was all window and no walls! He was completely dependent on the Father, choosing to become weak so that God’s strength could shine through Him. And He was the strongest person the world has ever seen. Not His own strength; He displayed the Father’s strength because of that very weakness.

The reason His strength can shine through us is because we know God better through suffering. One wise man I heard said, “I got theology in seminary, but I learned reality through trials. I got facts in Sunday School, but I learned faith

through trusting God in difficult circumstances. I got truth from studying, but I got to know the Savior through suffering."

Sometimes our suffering isn't a consequence of our actions or even someone else's. God is teaching other beings about Himself and His loved ones—us—as He did with Job. The point of Job's trials was to enable heavenly beings to see God glorified in Job. Sometimes He trusts us with great pain in order to make a point, whether the intended audience is believers, unbelievers, or the spirit realm. Quadriplegic Joni Eareckson Tada, no stranger to great suffering, writes, "Whether a godly attitude shines from a brain-injured college student or from a lonely man relegated to a back bedroom, the response of patience and perseverance counts. God points to the peaceful attitude of suffering people to teach others about Himself. He not only teaches those we rub shoulders with every day, but He instructs the countless millions of angels and demons. The hosts in heaven stand amazed when they observe God sustain hurting people with His peace."{4}

I once heard Charles Stanley say that nothing attracts the unbeliever like a saint suffering successfully. Joni Tada said, "You were made for one purpose, and that is to make God real to those around you."{5} The reality of God's power, His love, and His character are made very, very real to a watching world when we trust Him in our pain.

Suffering Gets Us Ready for Heaven

Pain is inevitable because we live in a fallen world. 1 Thessalonians 3:3 reminds us that we are "destined for trials." We don't have a choice whether we will suffer—our choice is to go through it by ourselves or with God.

Suffering teaches us the difference between the important and the transient. It prepares us for heaven by teaching us how unfulfilling life on earth is and helping us develop an

eternal perspective. Suffering makes us homesick for heaven.

Deep suffering of the soul is also a taste of hell. After many sleepless nights wracked by various kinds of pain, my friend Jan now knows what she was saved from. Many Christians only know they're saved without grasping what it is Christ has delivered them from. Jan's suffering has given her an appreciation of the reality of heaven, and she's been changed forever.

I have an appreciation of heaven gained from a different experience. As my body weakens from the lifelong impact of polio, to be honest, I have a deep frustration with it that makes me grateful for the perfect, beautiful, completely working resurrection body waiting for me on the other side. My husband once told me that heaven is more real to me than anyone he knows. Suffering has done that for me. Paul explained what happens in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

> *"Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*

One of the effects of suffering is to loosen our grasp on this life, because we shouldn't be thinking that life in a fallen world is as wonderful as we sometimes think it is. Pastor Dick Bacon once said, "If this life were easy, we'd just love it too much. If God didn't make it painful, we'd never let go of it." Suffering reminds us that we live in an abnormal world. Suffering is abnormal—our souls protest, "This isn't right!" We need to be reminded that we are living in the post-fall "Phase 2." The perfect Phase 1 of God's beautiful, suffering-free creation was ruined when Adam and Eve fell. So often, people wonder what kind of cruel God would deliberately make a

world so full of pain and suffering. They've lost track of history. The world God originally made isn't the one we experience. Suffering can make us long for the new heaven and the new earth where God will set all things right again.

Sometimes suffering literally prepares us for heaven. Cheryl's in-laws, both beset by lingering illnesses, couldn't understand why they couldn't just die and get it over with. But after three long years of holding on, during a visit from Cheryl's pastor, the wife trusted Christ on her deathbed and the husband received assurance of his salvation. A week later the wife died, followed in six months by her husband. They had continued to suffer because of God's mercy and patience, who did not let them go before they were ready for heaven.

Suffering dispels the cloaking mists of inconsequential distractions of this life and puts things in their proper perspective. My friend Pete buried his wife a few years ago after a battle with Lou Gehrig's disease. One morning I learned that his car had died on the way to church, and I said something about what a bummer it was. Pete just shrugged and said, "This is nothing." That's what suffering will do for us. Trials are light and momentary afflictions . . . but God redeems them all.

Notes

1. Oswald Chambers, *Our Utmost for His Highest,* September 1.
2. Chambers, June 25.
3. *National and International Religion Report,* Vol. 9:10, May 1, 1995, 1
4. Joni Eareckson Tada, *When Is It Right to Die?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 122.
5. Tada, 118.

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Bible Literacy Quiz: A Test of Scripture Knowledge

Take this test of basic Bible knowledge to help assess your biblical literacy. This simple quiz examines some of the key doctrines and events of the Bible. It will give you a good feel for your breadth and depth of Scriptural knowledge.

This article is also available in Spanish.

It's alarming to us at Probe Ministries to see the drop in biblical literacy among Americans. Growing numbers of people don't know what the Bible says, even the most basic foundational truths and people and facts.

Evangelical pollster George Barna says,

> Over the past 20 years we have seen the nation's theological views slowly become less aligned with the Bible. Americans still revere the Bible and like to think of themselves as Bible-believing people, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Christians have increasingly been adopting spiritual views that come from Islam, Wicca, secular humanism, the eastern religions and other sources.{1}

That's because we're not reading and studying the Bible. If we don't know what God says is truth, it makes us vulnerable to believing a lie.

Take the quiz yourself: click here for a format with the questions and answers separated.

1. Who wrote the first four books of the New Testament?

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

2. Who wrote the first five books of the Old Testament?

Most conservative scholars hold that the Pentateuch was written by Moses.

3. What two Old Testament books are named for women?

Esther and Ruth.

4. What are the Ten Commandments?

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife—or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exodus 20:2-17)

5. What is the Greatest Commandment?

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37,38)

6. What is the second Greatest Commandment?

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39)

7. What is the Golden Rule?

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (Matthew 7:12)

8. What is the Great Commission?

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19,20)

9. What was the test of a prophet, to know that he was truly from God?

He had to be 100% accurate in his prophecies. The penalty for a false prophet was death by stoning. (Deuteronomy 18:20-22)

10. To whom did God give the 10 Commandments?

Moses. (Exodus 20)

11. Which two people did not die?

Genesis 5:24 says that Enoch, who was Noah’s great-grandfather, “walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.” The other was the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind with a chariot and horses of fire. (2 Kings 2:11)

12. What is the root of all kinds of evil?

The love of money. (1 Timothy 6:10)

13. What is the beginning of wisdom?

The fear of the Lord. (Psalm 111:10)

14. Who delivered the Sermon on the Mount?

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 5-7)

15. How did sickness and death enter the world?

Romans 5:12 says that sin entered the world though one man, and death through sin. The fall of man is recorded in Genesis 3, where God’s perfect creation was spoiled by Adam’s sin.

16. Who was the Roman governor who sentenced Christ to death?

Pontius Pilate. (Matthew 27:26)

17. Who are the major prophets?

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

18. What people group is the Old Testament about?

The Hebrews, who became the nation of Israel. They were descendants of Abraham though Isaac.

19. What happened while the Lord Jesus was in the desert for 40 days?

He was tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1) Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

20. How many people were on Noah’s ark?

Eight: Noah and his wife, his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives. (Genesis 7:13, 1 Peter 2:5)

21. Who was the first murderer?

Cain, who killed his brother Abel. (Genesis 4:8)

22. Which person was afflicted with terrible trials but trusted God through it all?

Job. (See book of Job)

23. Who was Israel’s most well-known and well-loved king?

David. (1 Chronicles 29:28)

24. Who was “the weeping prophet?”

Jeremiah.

25. Who was thrown into the lion’s den?

Daniel. (Daniel 6)

26. Who were the two people in the famous fight with a stone and a sling?

David and Goliath. (1 Samuel 17)

27. What is the book of Acts about?

The early years of the church, as the gospel begins to spread throughout the world.

28. What are epistles?

Letters.

29. On what occasion was the Holy Spirit given to the church?

Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4)

30. Whom did God command to sacrifice his only son?

Abraham. (Genesis 22:2)

31. What was the Old Testament feast that celebrated God’s saving the firstborn of Israel the night they left Egypt?

Passover. (Exodus 12:27)

32. Who was the Hebrew who became prime minister of Egypt?

Joseph. (Genesis 41:41)

33. Who was the Hebrew woman who became Queen of Persia?

Esther. (Esther 2:17)

34. Who was the pagan woman who became David's great-grandmother?

Ruth. (Ruth 4:17)

35. Which angel appeared to Mary?

Gabriel. (Luke 1:26)

36. How did the Lord Jesus die?

He gave up His life while being crucified. (John 19:18)

37. What happened to Him three days after He died?

He was raised from the dead. (John 20)

38. What happened to the Lord Jesus 40 days after His resurrection?

He ascended bodily into heaven. (Acts 1:9-11)

39. What should we do when we sin, in order to restore our fellowship with God?

1 John 1:9 tells us, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

40. How did the universe and world get here?

Genesis 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." We are told further in Colossians 1:16 and 17 that the Lord Jesus Christ was the one who did the creating.

41. Where did Satan and the demons come from?

Satan was originally the best and the brightest angel, but he sinned in his pride, wanting to be God. Some of the angels followed him, and these “fallen angels” were cast out of heaven. (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28)

42. Who directed the writing of the Bible?

The Holy Spirit. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21)

43. Where was the Lord Jesus before He was conceived in Mary?

In heaven. (Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Corinthians 15:49)

44. Who taught in parables?

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 13:3)

45. What are parables?

A short, simple story with a spiritual point.

46. Which two animals talked with human speech?

The serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:3) and Balaam’s donkey (Numbers 22:28).

47. With which woman did David commit adultery?

Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 11)

48. Which one of their sons succeeded David as king?

Solomon. (2 Samuel 12:24)

49. Who was the female judge of Israel?

Deborah. (Judges 4:4)

50. Who was the wisest man in the world?

Solomon. (1 Kings 3:12)

51. Who was the first man?

Adam. (Genesis 2:20)

52. Who was the most humble man on earth?

Moses. (Numbers 12:3)

53. Who was the strongest man on earth?

Samson. (Judges 13-16)

54. Where were the two nations of God’s people taken into captivity?

Israel was taken into Assyria (2 Kings 17:23), and Judah into Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:20).

55. Which cupbearer to a foreign king rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem?

Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 2:5)

56. Who were the two Old Testament prophets who worked miracles?

Elijah and Elisha. (1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 6)

57. Which Old Testament prophet spent three days in the belly of a great fish?

Jonah. (Jonah 1:17)

58. What is the last book of the Old Testament?

Malachi.

59. For which Israelite commander did the sun stand still?

Joshua. (Joshua 10)

60. Who was the first king of Israel?

Saul. (1 Samuel 13:1)

61. Who built the temple in Israel?

Solomon. (1 Kings 6)

62. Which of the twelve tribes of Israel served as priests?

Levites. (Deuteronomy 10:8)

63. Which city fell after the Israelites marched around it daily for seven days?

Jericho. (Joshua 6:20)

64. What did God give the Israelites to eat in the wilderness?

Manna and quail. (Exodus 16)

65. Which two people walked on water?

Jesus and Peter. (Matthew 14:29)

66. Who was the first martyr?

Stephen. (Acts 7)

67. Who betrayed Jesus to the priests, and for how much?

Judas betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave. (Matthew 26:14-15)

68. What is the Lord's Prayer?

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13)

69. Who was the first person to see the risen Lord?

Mary Magdalene. (John 20:16)

70. Which prophet and cousin of the Lord was beheaded?

John the Baptist. (John 14:10)

71. To what country did the young Jesus and His parents escape when Herod was threatening His life?

Egypt. (Matthew 2:13-15)

72. What was Christ's first miracle?

He turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana. (John 2:11)

73. Which one of the Lord's personal friends did He raise from the dead?

Lazarus. (John 11)

74. Who was the greatest missionary of the New Testament?

Paul. (see book of Acts)

75. Who was Paul's first partner?

Barnabas. (Acts 13:2)

76. Whom did an angel release from prison?

Peter. (Acts 12)

77. Which event caused God to splinter human language into many tongues?

The building of the Tower of Babel. (Genesis 11)

78. Which chapter of an Old Testament prophet's book gives a detailed prophecy of the Messiah's death by crucifixion?

Isaiah 53.

79. Who wrestled all night with the Lord and was left with a permanent limp?

Jacob. (Genesis 32:22-32)

80. Which two pastors did Paul write letters to?

Timothy and Titus.

81. Who was hailed as a god when he was bitten by a snake but nothing bad happened?

Paul. (Acts 28:5-6)

82. Which two New Testament writers were brothers of the Lord Jesus?

James and Jude. (Matthew 13:55)

83. Which two New Testament books were written by a doctor?

Luke and Acts. (2 Timothy 4:11)

84. Who had a coat of many colors?

Joseph. (Genesis 37:3)

85. In what sin did Aaron lead the Israelites while his brother Moses was up on the mountain talking to God?

They made an idol in the form of a golden calf. (Exodus 32)

86. How many books are there in the entire Bible?

66: 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament.

87. What's the difference between John the Baptist and the John who wrote several New Testament books?

John the Baptist was a prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of God was near in preparation for his cousin Jesus' ministry.

The John who wrote the gospel of John, the epistles—1, 2 and 3 John—and Revelation, was one of the twelve apostles and one of those closest to the Lord, along with Peter and James. He called himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

88. Who saw the Lord appear to him in a burning bush?

Moses. (Exodus 3)

89. How many sons did Jacob have?

Twelve. They were the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. (Genesis 35:22)

90. Who gave up his birthright for a bowl of stew?

Esau. (Genesis 25:33)

91. Which Psalm starts out, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want?”

Psalm 23.

92. Who disowned the Lord Jesus three times before a cock crowed?

Peter. (Matthew 26:69-75)

93. What did the Lord do just after the Last Supper to demonstrate His love and humility?

He washed the disciples’ feet. (John 13:5)

94. Where is the New Testament “Hall of Faith?”

Hebrews 11.

95. Who appeared with the Lord Jesus in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration?

Elijah and Moses. (Mark 9:4)

96. Who is the second Adam?

The Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:45-49)

97. Which Old Testament prophet married a prostitute because God told him to?

Hosea. (Hosea 1:2)

98. What are the two sacred ordinances that the Lord commanded us to observe?

Baptism (Matthew 28:19,20) and Communion, or the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

99. What are supernatural enablings that allow a believer to serve the Body of Christ with ease and effectiveness?

Spiritual gifts. (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:8-13, 1 Peter 4:10-11)

100. Whose tomb was Christ buried in?

Joseph of Arimathea. (Matthew 27:57-60)

101. Who wrote the book of Hebrews?

Nobody knows.

102. Which is the "epistle of joy?"

Philippians.

103. What is the book of Revelation about?

The end of the world.

104. Who is the bride of Christ?

The church—that is, all who have trusted Him for salvation. (Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 19:7-8)

Note

1. bit.ly/fR8BuA

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Grace and Truth About LGBT

Sue Bohlin provides a compassionate, biblically based look at what is happening as LGBT ideology has taken root in the culture.

What Does God Think About LGBT?

This article is about grace and truth in the context of LGBT, those who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender. What does God think about people for whom this is their primary (or even secret) identity?

After 20-plus years of walking with dear friends dealing with unwanted same-sex attraction, the very first thing that comes to my mind is the deep compassion and tenderness of our God toward wounded and deceived people that He loves very much. I am reminded of Isaiah's words (42:3), "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."

People *discover* attractions toward those of the same sex. They don't initially choose them. These disordered feelings are like the warning lights on the dashboard of a car. They are saying, "Something's wrong under the hood; check it out!" So in the beginning, same-sex attractions constitute *temptation* rather than sin, but it easily crosses over to sin when people choose to feed and nurture thought patterns that God's word says are sin.

And God’s word has always called sexual behavior outside of marriage between a man and woman, sin. That’s because sex is deeply spiritual as well as physical, and He wants to protect us from the harmful consequences of sexual sin. His word will last forever, and it doesn’t change. So I believe God is grieved when people reject His clear biblical statements about sexual sin, as is now happening in many churches and individuals.

God’s word calls us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. An important part of the Kingdom message is that God changes believers more and more into the likeness of Jesus. That means that God endorses *change,* which makes sense since growth and change are an intrinsic part of life.

But the cultural narrative says that your sexuality can’t be changed. If people don’t want their broken same-sex attractions, and seek help recovering God’s intended design for them, it is becoming illegal to do that. It’s labeled as “conversion therapy.” But if someone says they’re transgender and seeks to inject their healthy body with artificial hormones and mutilate it with surgery to pretend they are something they’re not, that’s called “gender affirmation.” Yes, it’s backward.

God addressed this backward thinking in Isaiah 5:20—“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”

Back to the cultural narrative says that your sexuality can’t be changed. That’s not what some social scientists have found, which is that sexuality can be quite fluid and changeable.{1} There is no magic switch to flip from homosexual to heterosexual; but when people invite God into the woundings and deficits of their earlier life and receive healing in their souls, some can develop attractions to the opposite sex. I have personally seen this happen multiple times. The problem

is that people aren't telling their stories, or when they try, they aren't believed.

Disordered thinking and unnatural desires are not too hard for God to handle. Remember, He can raise the dead!

Cultural Lies vs. God's Truth

There is a massive clash between the lies of our sex-saturated culture, and the eternal truth of God's word.

CULTURE'S LIE: Who I am is a sexual being. Whether it's a culture or an individual, when God is left out of the equation, sex is elevated to the #1 most important spot because it's so powerful and a source of such intense pleasure (or can be). So people define themselves by their sexuality.
GOD'S TRUTH: Who I am is God's beloved creation. Made in the image of God, created for intimacy and fellowship with Him, my worth proven by what the Son was willing to pay for me: His very life.

CULTURE'S LIE: Sex is a need and a right for everyone to experience. Many people believe it is on the same level of necessity as food, water and sleep.
GOD'S TRUTH: Sex is so powerful it is to be contained only within marriage between one man and one woman. The mingling of bodies and souls through sex is deeply spiritual as well as physical. God's prohibitions against sex outside of marriage are His gift to us, meant for our protection from the painful consequences of sexual sin. They are like guard rails on a treacherous mountain road, intended to keep us from going off the cliff to pain and destruction.

CULTURE'S LIE: I create my own identity depending on what I feel. Untethered from a connection to God as Creator, people live out the sad, repeated description of Israel in the book of Judges, where "all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes." (Judges 17:6, for one).

GOD'S TRUTH: My identity is who my Creator says I am. All of us exist because God wanted us and hand-crafted each of us (Psalm 139). Feelings are real but they're not reliable. Jeremiah 17:9 instructs us on why our feelings can't be trusted: "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"

CULTURE'S LIE: Gender is whatever we want it to be. Biological sex has been separated from gender (how one feels about maleness and femaleness). (Personally, this strikes me as illegitimate as proclaiming that the white keys on a piano are bad and the black keys are good.)
GOD'S TRUTH: God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; *male and female* He created them. (Genesis 1:27) The first words in the room when a baby is born are still, "It's a girl!" or "It's a boy!" Gender is still binary because God still creates only male and female.

CULTURE'S LIE: I can create my own reality. For example, recently a man abandoned his wife and seven children, announcing his chosen identity of a 6-year-old girl.{2}

Another man, deciding his identity is a female dragon, cut off his ears and nose, dyed his eyes, and inserted horns in his forehead.{3}

GOD'S TRUTH: There is objective truth and objective reality because God is real and true. We do not have the freedom to dismiss what is objectively true and real; 2 + 2 will always

be 4, not 7 or 200, and gravity will always be operational on the planet. These things are real and true because a real and true God rooted His creation in His own nature.

CULTURE'S LIE: "Born this way." This lie has so much traction because it's repeated so often people assume it to be true.
GOD'S TRUTH: No Evidence. There is actually no scientific evidence of a gay gene or any other determiner of same-sex attraction. And in identical twins (who share the same DNA), when one identifies as gay or lesbian, the other one only identifies as gay or lesbian about 11% of the time. If homosexuality were a genetic issue, the correspondence would be 100%.

American culture continues to pump out the illusion—the fantasy, the myth—that sexuality is the most important thing about life and about us, and that sexual identity and expression is where life is found.

Life is found in Jesus, and nowhere else.

Transgender: The Emperor's New Clothes

In the old story of the Emperor's New Clothes, scam artists appeal to the pride of a conceited emperor, claiming they can create a magical outfit for him that is invisible to anyone who is unfit for their position, stupid, or incompetent. He parades his new suit of clothes before his subjects, which of course no one can see because it's a scam. But no one will say they don't see it lest they be seen as stupid. Finally a little boy pipes up and blurts out the truth: "But he isn't wearing anything at all!"{4}

The transgender narrative is the equivalent of the Emperor's New Clothes. The objective truth is that there is no such thing as magical clothes, and there's no such thing as changing genders. People can only deceive themselves (and others), damage their bodies, and mutilate themselves—but our

God-ordained maleness and femaleness, our biological sex, is stamped into every cell of our bodies.

It's especially alarming when parents, educators and other authorities feed a child's fantasy that they are the other gender. We would never do that if a child declared herself to be a cat or a unicorn; we would gently and lovingly correct her wrong thinking by speaking the truth to her. But if a boy insists he's a girl or vice versa, many progressive-minded adults are so proud of their "wokeness" that they rush to board the child on the transgender train.

Most often, children who reject their gender are reacting to gender stereotypes. Girls can think that boys get to do cooler stuff than girls, and sensitive boys who love pink and purple sparkly things can think it's better to be a girl. Both sexes who experience abuse can believe that it would be safer to be the opposite sex.

Children never see the big picture—that's why God gives them parents to help them see their world more accurately. One little boy told his parents he wanted to be a girl but no one inquired why, they just jumped on the transgender bandwagon. Turns out that when his baby sister was born and consumed a lot of attention because she was very sick, he concluded that if he were a girl, he would get the same attention.

Transgender – Part 2

When a person experiences a conflict between their biological sex and their internal sense of whether they are male or female, that's called gender dysphoria. Various studies have shown that this very painful emotional state resolves itself about 85% of the time simply by going through puberty. It appears to reset things. So the best and wisest treatment is no treatment at all, but of course wise parents and other adults will continue to speak truth about a child's identity—especially the truth that God who is good, loving and

wise chose their gender for them, so we need to receive it as His gift.

This whole transgender phenomenon has ignited where children have access to the internet on their smart phones. The illusion of transgender is easily spread by social contagion. Children and teens talk about their beliefs that they are transgender on social media, and their impressionable peers are influenced to start thinking and feeling the same way. The popularity of social media has sped up the spread of this fantasy, especially on the Tumblr platform. One academic who studied the reports of parents alarmed by sudden changes in their children coined the term "rapid onset gender dysphoria."{5}

Anyone who has been around adolescents for any length of time doesn't need to be surprised by this dynamic. Teens copy each other in all kinds of ways.

Many adolescents who identify as transgender suffer from anxiety, depression, and self-injury.{6} There is a whole constellation of painful mental health struggles all bound up together. We are also finding that a disproportionate number of teens who explore the transgender identity are on the autism spectrum.{7}

They already feel the shame of being different, of being "other than," and it's easy for them to mislabel themselves as transgender instead of just different.

One final note on transgender: we must not go along with the Emperor's New Clothes story that athletes can compete as the opposite sex just by declaring themselves so. It's not just heartbreaking, it's *wrong* for teenage boys to rob girl athletes of scholarships{8}, not to mention dignity, by unfairly competing against them and demanding to use their restrooms and locker rooms.{9}

Why Have So Many Christians and Entire Churches Become Pro-Gay?

More and more individuals and churches have come out in support of homosexuality and gay marriage. Why is that?

I think there are two big reasons so many confessing believers in Christ have allowed themselves to be more shaped by the culture than by the truth of God's word, drifting into spiritual compromise and even into apostasy, which means abandoning the truth of one's faith.

Reason One: Rejecting the Authority of God's Word

The first reason is that millions of people are rejecting the authority of God's word.

The bitter fruit of several decades of shallow preaching, teaching and discipleship is that many believers have been especially vulnerable to Satan's deceptive question to Eve in the Garden of Eden: "Did God really say . . .?" When Christians ignore or flat-out reject the unmistakably clear biblical statements condemning homosexual behavior, they are playing into the enemy's temptation to justify disobedience by making feelings and perceptions more important than God's design and standards.

There are now two streams of thought on same-sex relationships and behavior: the Traditional, Biblical View and the Revisionist View.{10} The Revisionist View basically says, "It doesn't matter what the Bible actually says, it doesn't mean what 2000 years of church history has said it means, it means what we want it to say." And we want it to say that God endorses all relationships that invoke love."

Reason Two: Snagged by the Gay Agenda

When people don't submit themselves to the truth of the Word of God, they are easily shaped and swayed by the six points of

a brilliantly designed "Gay Manifesto" spelled out in a book called *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s.*{11} This gay agenda has been executed perfectly in the United States. (Note: these are the authors' words, not mine.)

> *1. Talk about gays and gayness as loudly and often as possible.*
>
> *2. Portray members of the LGBTQ community as victims.* Indoctrinate mainstream America that members of the LGBTQ community were "born this way."
>
> *3. Give protectors a just cause: anti-discrimination.*
>
> *4. The use of TV, music, film and social media to desensitize mainstream Americans to their plight as gay people.*
>
> *5. Portray Gays and Lesbians as pillars in society.* Make gays look good.
>
> *6. Once homosexuals have begun to gain acceptance, anti-gay opponents must be vilified, causing them to be viewed as repulsive outcasts of society.*

This is how I see how we got to this place where so many people have been deceived. They didn't anchor themselves to the Truth of the Word of God, and they opened themselves to the cultural brine of Kirk and Madsen's plan to overhaul straight America.

I will close with four personal observations about this situation:

1. Christians have bought into the culture's worship of feelings over God's unchanging revelation

2. People love how making themselves an ally and protector of the underdog makes them feel, despite God's design and

standards for sexuality and marriage.

3. Not enough of us Christ-followers are living lives that demonstrate the beauty and satisfaction of abiding in Christ.

4. The church has been dismal at loving those who struggle with their sexuality and showing them the grace that is in God's heart toward them. It's essential to both speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and seek to show love filled with truth.

Notes

1. www.sciencealert.com/sexual-orientation-continues-to-change-right-through-our-teens-and-into-adulthood
2. www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3356084/I-ve-gone-child-Husband-father-seven-52-leaves-wife-kids-live-transgender-SIX-YEAR-OLD-girl-named-Stefonknee.html
3. unbelievable-facts.com/2016/04/transgender-dragon-lady.html
4. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Emperor%27s_New_Clothes
5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapid_onset_gender_dysphoria_controversy
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10. bible.org/article/reformation-church-doesn-t-need-answering-revisionist-pro-gay-theology-part-i
11. Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, *After the Ball: How*

America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

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"How Can You Say I Can't Lose My Salvation?"

I mess up all the time, and God is holy all the time. How can you say I can't lose my salvation?

I'm so glad you asked!

First– and please hear me say this firmly but gently– it's not your salvation to lose. It is a free gift from God. Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." You did nothing to earn God's gift of salvation, and you can do nothing to "ungift" it. As some have said, salvation is 100% God and 0% human effort. All we do is receive it, by faith. And God even gives us the grace to receive it in the first place! As I said, it's 100% God.

Let me suggest three points that support the position that you can't lose God's gift of salvation.

1. God makes some breathtaking, unconditional promises in the Bible that express His heart toward us.

I love most what Jesus said in John 10:27-30–

> "My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never

perish; ***no one will snatch them from My hand***. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and ***no one can snatch them from My Father's hand***. The Father and I are one."

We are doubly safe; we are held securely in the Father's hand and the Son's hand. No one, not even ourselves, can snatch us from that place of eternal security.

Then, in both the Old Testament (Joshua 1:5) and the New Testament (Hebrews 13:5), God promises, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

In 2 Timothy 2:13, we read that "If we are unfaithful (or "unbelieving"), God is faithful."

We are safe in the Lord's love, protection, care . . . and salvation.

2. We have been promised *everlasting* (or eternal) life, not *temporary* life.

Jesus promised in John 5:24, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has *everlasting* life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

And in 1 John 5:13, Jesus' best friend writes, "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may **know** that you have *eternal* life."

It's not everlasting or eternal if you could stop it by doing something to lose your salvation!

3. You have been forgiven completely and totally.

When Jesus breathed His last on the cross with the statement, "It is finished/paid in full," that was about paying the penalty for your sins, my sins, all the sins of all the humans on the planet. And He paid for ALL of them 2000+ years

ago—when all your sins were still future. Praise God, you are not powerful enough to undo what Jesus did for you on the cross.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit worked together to give you the magnificent gift of salvation. It's a forever gift and you can relax in the Lord's security.

I hope you find this helpful.

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

(I am indebted to the online discussion between Dr. Sean McDowell and Dr. Andrew Farley for perspective on this issue.)

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Acorns, Oak Trees, and Our Son's Grave

While visiting their son's grave, Sue Bohlin meditated on the glory of the '2.0 resurrection body' that we look forward to.

On the one-year anniversary of our son's death, my husband and I drove out to the DFW National Cemetery to find Curt's grave.

I have never been one to visit loved ones' gravesites. I always thought, "Why? They're not there. They're not in the ground, they're in heaven."

But lately I've been thinking differently about our bodies. They are more than just physical cases for who we are inside. We ARE our bodies, as well as our souls. Human beings are a

unified creation of the material and the immaterial.

So I stood on the ground, thinking about this, above Curt's body. A precious body, the body I carried inside mine for nine months, and then carried in my arms until he learned to walk. The body of the boy I loved, and still do. The body of the man who looked so handsome in his Air Force uniform. The body that was placed in a casket to be buried a year ago while we honored him at his memorial service.

As I reminded myself that Curt's "body 1.0" is precious and dear, I thought back to the great privilege of teaching 1 Corinthians 15 and the "2.0 resurrection bodies" that await us.

When I taught that day, I held up an acorn from our front yard.

"An acorn is an oak seed," I said. "It has the same DNA as an oak tree. Is the acorn the same as the oak tree? Yes . . . and no.

"They are stages of the same plant, they're the same genetically, but of course they are different.

"What happens to an acorn? It gets planted in the ground, it falls apart and dies, then it sprouts new life . . . and eventually it is transformed into an oak tree."

The buried acorn absorbs moisture from the soil and rain, and the outer husk softens. The bare seed inside is exposed, and things change. Little tendrils shoot out and start to grow down into the soil. The acorn falls apart, and that first stage basically dies, but the oak tree can't come to life unless the seed dies. But a little acorn can become a HUGE

tree!

The acorn can't even begin to imagine the **size** and **power** and **majesty** and **beauty** of the oak tree. It can't fathom becoming something big enough and strong enough for someone to build a treehouse in its branches, where kids can play. Mind blowing!

Our bodies are like the acorn planted in the ground. They get sick, weak, and they die. But that's not the end, like the acorn falling apart in the ground isn't the end.

We have the hope of experiencing a **new form of physical bodily existence** that is as different from our earthly bodies as the oak tree is different from an acorn.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 says,

> What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Our natural body, our "Earth suit," is subject to aging, disease and death. Like an acorn.

What a contrast with our spiritual body—our "New Earth suit"?—which will be strong, vibrant, and glorious. Like a big, beautiful, glorious oak tree.

I love to meditate on the resurrection body, our spiritual body. We can see from the gospel records what Jesus' resurrection body was like:

• Jesus' body still had His wounds.
• It was physical. The disciples could touch Him; in fact He commanded that Thomas reach out and touch His wrist, and put his hand in Jesus' side where the spear had pierced His chest.
• He could travel effortlessly and instantly, appearing and disappearing at will.

• He was able to pass through walls and doors.
• He could-and did-eat, drink, and talk.
• He handled material things (He wasn't a ghost or an illusion).
• His resurrected body was more real, of more substance, than ours is.

His resurrected body was the oak tree compared to the acorn.

According to Randy Alcorn's wonderful book *Heaven*, Curt is experiencing the intermediate heaven today. It's unimaginably beautiful and glorious, but it's not the still-future unification of heaven and earth where we will receive our resurrection bodies—and things will get even better.

Our "oak tree bodies" still lie ahead. And that sure makes me smile.

This blog post originally appeared at Acorns, Oak Trees, and Our Son's Grave on July 10, 2025.

How Contagious Are You?

When someone shared their cold with Sue Bohlin on a recent cruise, it made her think about how contagious we can be in different ways, for good and for bad.

Halfway through my last cruise, I suddenly became aware of my throat. That's always my first sign of a cold, so I started popping zinc tablets every few hours to fight back. People share their germs on cruise ships, especially those with thousands of passengers; contagion is just a fact of life. I wasn't surprised.

Many people are now more aware of social contagion. Just like colds and flu, we can easily “catch” other people’s feelings and behaviors and beliefs.

Like anger. Proverbs 22:24-25 warns us, “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.”

Like entitlement. The proliferation of short “Karen” videos putting self-centered entitlement on full display seems to have made this obnoxiousness multiply.

While these two rotten character traits have proven to be socially contagious, what is deeply heartbreaking to me is the social contagion of teens (and even younger) identifying as transgender. Adolescence is hard and awkward for just about anyone, but when kids are addicted to social media and never put their phones down, the “trans disease” (for lack of a better term) sweeps through schools and classes and friend groups, picking up steam as it picks off youth struggling with who they are and afraid of who they are supposed to become.

Recently, when reading in 1 Samuel. I was struck by the people of Israel telling the last judge, Samuel, “Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have.” (8:5)

Well, what do you know? Social contagion in the Old Testament!

I have been especially aware of the power of contagion ever since our family doctor asked me once, “You live with two depressed men (my husband and our son), and depression is contagious. What are you doing to protect yourself?”

I laughed, “As it happens, I just got off a short cruise with my sister. Four solid days of joy and laughter and fun with no depression in sight.” She said, “You need to do that regularly.” (And I do. Which is one reason I am “the cruise queen.”)

I didn’t realize depression could be contagious, but it makes sense. Because a number of negative things can be quite contagious. As my other son, who owns several specialty coffee cafés in San Francisco assures me, critical speech and gossip can be contagious. Some of his baristas had absorbed bad habits from each other and it’s heartbreaking.

Negativity is contagious. Like wearing sunglasses indoors, a negative mindset can manifest in someone’s words and even micro-expressions, coloring the thinking and reactions of those around them.

But you know what?

Gratitude can also be contagious.

Lightheartedness can be contagious.

Courtesy can be contagious.

Complimenting and affirming others can be contagious.

Generosity. Enthusiasm. Vulnerability, Laughter.

Even faith.

Contagion, it seems, can be bad . . . or beautiful.

The Glory of Grace

Sue Bohlin explores God’s marvelous grace as the unending flow of His power, presence and favor in our lives.

I bet you recognize “grace” as a theology word. Many of us are quick to say, “Oh yeah, I know what that is. We’re saved by grace through faith.” Or we know of churches with the word

“grace” in their name. But many of us don’t have a real handle on it. Often that’s because we haven’t seen it modeled in our families, our churches, or our communities. We’re too focused on trying to prove ourselves good enough, too busy trying to keep God from getting mad at us.

But this misunderstood blessing of grace is *hugely* important. It’s one of the big things that sets Christianity apart from all other religions! Any other world religion involves performance-based works. Biblical Christianity says, “We’re messed-up broken people before a holy God, and there’s nothing we can do to earn His approval. But He loves us and delights in us despite the fact that we don’t deserve it.” With all other religions, the emphasis is on “do.” Because of grace, in Christianity the emphasis is on “done.”{1}

One of the most powerful elements of grace is simply *acceptance.* The book of Romans assures us that we are accepted by both the Father (Romans 14:3) and the Son (Romans 15:7). We can do nothing to earn Their acceptance; it’s a gift. The Father says, “I accept you just the way you are, but I love you too much to leave you that way. Come to Me: My arms and My heart are open to you because of what My Son did in His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. I have always loved you, My precious child. I chose you before the foundation of the world, to adopt you into My family.”{2} I love to think of God stamping our foreheads with an invisible tattoo that says, “Accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6, KJV).

Pastor Mark Driscoll has an especially great definition of grace. Instead of the one we’ve heard for years, “God’s undeserved favor,” Mark calls it “ill-deserved” favor.{3} But my all-time favorite definition comes from John Ortberg: “Grace is the offer of God’s ceaseless presence and irrational love that cannot be stopped. It’s the flow of God’s power and presence and favor in your life from one moment to the next

that enables you to do whatever it is God has for you to do."{4} I want to focus on God's power, presence, and favor, as well as giving some real-life examples of what grace looks like.

Power

A little boy was playing in his sandbox one Saturday morning when he discovered a large rock in the middle of it. The boy dug around the rock, managing to dislodge it from the dirt. With a little bit of struggle, he pushed and nudged the rock across the sandbox. But then he found that he couldn't roll it up and over the little wall. The boy shoved, pushed, and pried, but every time he thought he had made some progress, the rock tipped and then fell back into the sandbox.

All this time the boy's father watched from his window as the drama unfolded and his son burst into tears of frustration.

As the tears fell, a large shadow fell across the boy and the sandbox. It was the boy's father. He asked, "Son, why didn't you use all the strength that you had available?"

The boy sobbed, "But I did, Daddy, I did! I used all the strength that I had!"

The father corrected kindly, "No, son, you didn't use all the strength you had. You didn't ask me." With that, the father reached down, picked up the rock and removed it from the sandbox.

Experiencing God grace means depending on Him to provide the power for our lives, whether it's dislodging a big ol' rock in our sandbox or simply making it through the day.

I like to think of the power of God's grace as electricity that is available twenty-four hours, seven days a week. God's grace is always available to us at every moment of our life,

and because of His goodness and faithfulness, we never have to fear a power shortage of God's grace.

The key to experiencing the flow of God's power is what Jesus called *abiding,* choosing to remain in a state of trustful dependence on God. Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for *apart from Me you can do nothing*."

I love to illustrate this by turning on a shop light that's plugged into an electrical outlet. When I press the switch, the light goes off, even though the power is still flowing and available. We can shut off the expression of grace, the flow of God's power, by quenching the Spirit—by actively disobeying God, or by passively ignoring Him. But His power can shine in our lives again as soon as we open ourselves up to Him, asking for His help, intentionally depending on His power and not our own. Grace is the flow of God's power in our lives.

Presence

One morning, as I swam laps in the health club pool, I was meditating on these three aspects of grace. I said, "Lord, what do You want me to know about Your presence?" At that very second, I "just happened" to see a large sign on the wall right in front of me: "WARNING: NO LIFEGUARD ON DUTY." I literally laughed out loud, realizing that this was code for "You're on your own, buddy." God's grace means we never have to fear that there's no lifeguard on duty, that we're on our own, because He has promised to never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5). The Lord Jesus' last promise was, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).

My favorite illustration of grace as God's presence is the building of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Dwight Edwards relates that during its initial stages of construction, "Twenty-three workers fell to their deaths.

Finally, halfway through the project, a large net was put in place beneath the bridge. From then on, only ten men actually fell—all caught by the net. Plus, the workers' productivity was raised by twenty-five percent. Assured that their safety was no longer in question, they pursued their work with far greater freedom and effectiveness than before. This is exactly what God has done for us. Stretched wide beneath us, extending from eternity past to eternity future, is God's perfect grace, assuring every believer that we can never fall from His favor. No matter how badly we falter or fail, we can never plunge past the grace of God."{5}

Think of grace as the hand of God ready to catch you when you fall. Because God is good and He is sovereign, that means nothing can happen that He cannot redeem. There is no such thing as an unrecoverable disaster. Even when we sin deliberately and stupidly, we cannot jump beyond the bounds of His grace. Now, His grace usually involves painful discipline, because God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6), but we cannot out-sin God's love and grace.

Recently, a friend of mine was anguishing, "Why did God allow me to wreck my marriage and family? I wouldn't let my children run out into the street and be hit by a car, why did He let *me* go that far?" As I turned to the Lord for an answer, He whispered, "I'm always protecting My children, but you don't see the disasters I avert." Part of God's grace is the safety of His protecting presence.

Favor

One important element of grace is favor. One dictionary defines favor as "an attitude of approval or liking."

Five-year-old Matt got up from his nap one day and said, "Guess what, mommy, I just had a dream about Jesus!" The mommy asked, "Well, what did Jesus say to you?" "Nothing." "Well,

what was Jesus doing?" "Nothing." "Now Matthew, you just said you had a dream about Jesus, he MUST have said or done *something*!" Matt was quiet for a moment, and then with a wiggle and grin he looked up and said shyly, "He just stood there and *liked* me."

When somebody likes you, their eyes light up when they see you. Did you know God's whole face lights up when He looks at *you*? The Bible talks about His face shining on us.{6} God doesn't only love us, He *likes* us! Experiencing God's grace means He showers not only love but *like* on us, and His face reflects His heart of favor toward us.

Every child needs to receive the "3 A's" of favor from his daddy: attention, affection, and approval. The Father poured out the 3 A's on the Lord Jesus at His baptism when He said, "You are My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."{7} Those words are like gold, and we can receive them into our own hearts as well.

I love the way one daddy blogger expresses grace toward his daughter. He writes,

> I love you. I love the way your hair rolls into ringlets and falls into your eyes. I love the way you read yourself books, even though you can't read. I love the way you dance and twirl around the kitchen. I love the way you wave at cars that pass on our walks. I love the way you scream "Dad" in the middle of the night. I love the way you say "do it again" when we do something fun. I even love the permanent marker custom design you put on my new Mac. But as much as I love you, Jesus loves you more. I sacrifice a lot because I love you, but Jesus sacrificed everything because he loves you. So if somewhere along the way you fail a test or love a boy who does not love you back or have a mastectomy or develop Alzheimer's or gain some weight or lose a job, you will still hold infinite value because Jesus loves you. No matter what. You are loved exactly as you are. Always.{8}

Oh yeah. That’s the beauty of grace.

What Grace Looks Like

I want to share some examples of what grace looks like, both the way God showers grace on us, and the way people share His grace with others.

God has poured grace on me in a huge way when traveling internationally. Because of a schedule change, I found myself flying back to Dallas from Germany just in time to speak at a weekend women’s retreat. I arrived home from the airport with just enough time to repack my bags and pick up my speaking notes and props. I then drove two hours to the retreat facility, arriving while the women were still singing. I literally got out of the car with my notebook in hand, walked in the door and up to the stage to start speaking. With the time difference, my body felt like it was five o’clock in the morning and I’d been awake for twenty-two hours. But God not only kept me alert, He filled me with His energy, and the women couldn’t tell any difference.

When we’ve received God’s grace, we are able to turn around and give it to others.

Grace means responding with patience when someone forgets they already told you something, or that you told *them* something, and just going with the flow. Grace means lifting off the burden of needless “shoulds” that weigh people down. One grace-filled speaker invited people to respond in song at the end of her message, saying, “If you’d like to sing, great! Join us! If you need a rest, feel free to just listen.” She removed any pressure to perform. At our church, a couple of pastors managed to deliver a message on giving and stewardship without even a hint of shame, or condemnation, or pressure. That’s what grace looks like.

When my friend’s mother contracted Alzheimer’s, she told her

daughter early in the progression of the disease, “If I get to the point where I don’t recognize you, don’t take it personally.” She was expressing grace in being more concerned about her daughter’s hurt than her own loss of memory.

Another friend needed eye surgery to keep her from losing her sight. Her friend Angela, who has been blind for a number of years, told our friend, “Don’t be concerned about talking about your vision to me—I am so over that!” That’s what grace looks like.

One of my favorite stories happened one night to my dear friend who was starting to realize what monsters her abusive parents were. She had always patterned herself after her mother, and suddenly realized she had even chosen the same dishes as her mother’s when they got married. Suddenly she couldn’t abide the thought of keeping them in the house a moment longer. She grabbed a plate out of the cupboard and hurled it to the floor, smashing it to pieces. Her husband heard the noise and came to see what was going on. When she explained the connection between their dishes and her mother, her husband calmly said, “Have at it. Tomorrow morning I’ll take you to get new dishes.” Not only did he clean up the mess when she was done, but all those shards damaged their kitchen floor—and he never once mentioned it. That’s grace.

Notes

1. See, for example, John 15:5; 19:30; Colossians 3:4; Ephesians 2:8-9.
2. Ephesians 1:4-5
3. marshill.com/media/religionsaves/grace
4. This quote came from a sermon preached at Pastor Ortberg’s church, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California, 2003. When I emailed him asking for a specific citation, his answer was, “I have no idea, Sue.”
5. Dwight Edwards, *Experiencing Christ Within Workbook: Passionately Embracing God’s Provisions for Supernatural*

Living (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2002), p. 105.
6. Numbers 6:25
7. Matthew 3:17
8. jeffdlawrence.com/2011/12/23/some-thoughts-on-how-to-talk-to-little-girls/

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