Theistic Evolution: The Failure of Neo-Darwinism

Sue Bohlin

Dr. Ray Bohlin provides an overview of the first section of a landmark book on theistic evolution, showing why evolution doesn’t hold up to scrutiny.

Three Good Reasons for People of Faith to Reject Darwin’s Explanation of Life

In this article I’m discussing the first of four sections in the book, *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique.*[1] I’ll be covering five chapters from the section, “The Failure of Neo-Darwinism.” First we’ll look at Doug Axe’s chapter titled, “Three Good Reasons for People of Faith to Reject Darwin’s Explanation of Life.”

I need to let you know from the start that I totally disagree with any theistic evolutionary perspective. As a biologist, I see no reason for any accommodation since Darwinism should be rejected on purely scientific grounds.

But moving along, Axe makes three points in this chapter. First, that there is a cost to any theistic evolution position. Second, Darwin’s view of life is false. Third, the reasons for the accommodation are confused. I want to focus on his first point that accommodating Darwin’s view of life within traditional faith is costly. He begins with a familiar quotation from the Book of Job 39:26-27. “Is it by your
understanding that the hawk soars and spreads his wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high?” Eventually, Job was appropriately humbled as he responded later in Job 42:3, “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” And if you don’t agree, then you should try to make an eagle. Oh, we can create flying toys with flapping wings and all, but these don’t come close to an actual eagle or hawk. These toys must be made on an assembly line with humans adding parts until the “eagle” is complete. With only the yolk and white of the egg as its nutrition, true eagles are formed within the egg by a seamless automated process. No human interference needed.

If a part breaks in the flying toy, it must be replaced by a human. Eagle’s bodies can mostly heal themselves and true eagles reproduce on their own. No flying toy will ever reproduce itself. Job’s response was correct. He didn’t respond, saying “Actually, God, hawks and eagles could have appeared by accident over millions of years.” As Doug states, “I see no way around the fact that the arresting awe we’re meant to have for the maker of the majestic eagle is lost the moment we accept that accidental physical processes could have done the making instead Neo-Darwinism and the Origin of Biological Form and Information. Now we turn to discussing Stephen Meyer’s chapter on the origin of biological form and genetic information.

Neo-Darwinism and the Origin of Biological Form and Information

Before we begin, I need to discuss what a body plan is. The body plan of an animal is the overall structure of the body. For instance, the butterfly and the polar bear have very different body plans. The butterfly has its skeleton on the outside, what’s known as an exoskeleton. The polar bear has an endoskeleton; the skeleton is on the inside of the body. Butterflies have wings, polar bears don’t. In fact, all the major organs, limbs and other body parts are arranged very
differently. So, each of these animals will need to form along very different pathways to arrive at the final product. The question becomes, “How does the evolutionary process form such different body plans from similar beginnings?”

Studies in developmental biology, the study of how organisms develop from fertilized egg to final product, show that changes in biological form require attention to the timing, especially those steps involved in developing the body plan. Also, there is a need for careful choreography in the expression of genetic information, not just when, but how much, how long lived, the proper sequence.

There are real problems here for Neo-Darwinism. Major evolutionary change requires changes in the body plan which is formed very early in embryonic development. So, mutations need to occur early. Mutations that may occur late have no effect on body plan. But numerous studies have shown that early mutations are inevitably lethal. Late mutations don’t produce body plan changes. As Meyer puts it, “The kind of mutations we need, we don’t get. The kind we get, we don’t need.”

There isn’t just a need for new genes and proteins for new functions of the organism. Polar bears can endure freezing temperatures, butterflies can’t. But new regulatory pathways are needed. Early development is controlled by developmental gene regulatory networks, or dGRNs. These networks regulate the time and perform the choreography. Any mutations here are always inevitably lethal. Neo-Darwinism can’t explain the origin of new animal body plans.

Are Present Proposals on Chemical Evolutionary Mechanisms Accurately Pointing toward First Life?

Now we will review Dr. James Tour’s discussion on the origin of life. Dr. Tour is the foremost authority on organic chemical synthesis. That is, he makes chemical
products based on the element carbon. This background makes him just the scientist to critique the chemical origin of the first life, since life is also based on the element carbon.

Tour begins by describing the start and stop necessity of making something as simple as a carbon-based car and a car that also contains a motor and then an even better motor. These nano cars take many steps to build. Usually Tour and colleagues run into a roadblock necessitating, before moving to the next step, that they back up several steps and redirect the process. He also documents that each stage usually requires different chemical requirements. This makes it necessary to purify your product. What he demonstrates is that making something comparably simple as a nano car requires intelligent input at every step. This will not happen by chance. Tour emphasizes that the undirected chemical synthesis to make useful biological molecules, and even a cell, is far more complex with no opportunity to start over again when you hit a dead-end.

After walking the reader through the many and enormous roadblocks a prebiotic chemist faces in trying to form the building blocks—sugars, amino acids, fatty acids, and nucleotides—and then the macromolecules; carbohydrates, proteins, lipids, DNA and RNA, and then trying to assemble these very different parts into a functioning, reproducing cell, Tour comes to a final conclusion.

“Those who think scientists understand how prebiotic chemical mechanisms produced the first life are wholly misinformed. Nobody understands how this happened. Maybe one day we will. But that day is far from today. It would be more helpful (and hopeful) to expose students to the massive gaps in our understanding. Then they may find a firmer—and possibly a radically different—scientific theory.”
Why DNA Mutations Cannot Accomplish What Neo-Darwinism Requires

Now we discuss Jonathan Wells’s chapter on why DNA mutations are insufficient to account for the arrival of new organisms through evolution. Mutations acted on by Natural Selection are what provides the variation, when given enough time and continued mutations with selection, to provide new types of organisms.

Dr. Wells begins his chapter by making sure we understand what is meant by the “Central Dogma.” It goes something like this: DNA makes RNA, makes protein, makes us. It was thought that all the instructions for building organisms was in the sequence code of DNA. But DNA never leaves the nucleus. The sequence of DNA that codes for a protein is transcribed into a molecule of RNA. The messenger RNA then leaves the nucleus and enters the cell, where molecular machines called ribosomes, translate the RNA code into protein code. Proteins are made of long chains of amino acids. Proteins are the workhorse of the cell. They speed up necessary chemical reactions the cell needs and provide structure and support. Our bodies are composed of organ systems, which are made up of organs, which are composed of tissues, and tissues are composed of cells that perform their functions through the proteins each cell makes. Therefore, DNA makes RNA, makes protein, makes us.

Over the last few decades, this analogy has fallen apart. Initially, a stretch of DNA that coded for a single protein was called a gene. One gene, one protein. We now know that the RNA transcribed from a gene can be split up into two or more segments and these segments put back together in several different ways. The RNA then doesn’t match the original sequence of DNA. About 95% of human genes can be spliced into more than one RNA and more than one protein. Proteins can also be modified with sequences of sugar molecules that are specific to a particular tissue. What controls the splicing and the addition of sugar molecules is still not fully known. But for various reasons, it’s not the DNA alone that
determines these variations on a central theme.

Evidence from Embryology Challenges Evolutionary Theory

Finally, I’ll cover the final chapter for this article, “Evidence from Embryology Challenges Evolutionary Theory.” Sheena Tyler states early that Darwin thought that “Embryology is to me by far the strongest class of facts in favor of change of form.”[2] Tyler goes on to indicate that in Darwin’s time, embryology was largely a black box of which little was known.

The section I’ll be covering is titled “Development is Orchestrated.” Tyler makes a comparison to a mystery novel where the author plans to ensure the different characters come together at the right place and time to resolve the mystery. Embryological development is very much like that. She mentions a four-dimensional pattern of stored information. The first three dimensions of this pattern revolve around being in the right place, the fourth dimension is time. So embryological proteins, chemicals and even electrical fields need to be available at the right time and place. Any deviation and the structures are ill-formed, or the embryo could even die.

Skeletal development in vertebrates starts with an electrical field that begins the process. And from there she quotes an embryologist indicating that the size and shape of skeletal elements in the embryo are “exquisitely regulated.” Another word used to describe the sequence of events is “precise.” This doesn’t sound like something that was cobbled together by chance over a few million years. There is a definite plan and prepattern that must be followed.

The central nervous system requires, again, a “precise and exquisitely regulated gene expression.” Another expression used is “intricately orchestrated.” Each developing neuron anticipates where a connection with another neuron will need
to be before contacting the other neuron.

Last, she mentions the heart and circulatory system. One embryologist reports that cardiac transcription factors (small proteins that help initiate the expression of a gene) choreograph the expression of thousands of genes at each stage of cardiac development. Every blood vessel ends up in the right place every time along with the proper architecture for veins or arteries. Just amazing!

**Notes**


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**Salt and Light Online**

Sue Bohlin

*During the pandemic, I was honored to be asked to address a student leadership*
conference for a Christian school in the Philippines via Zoom. Looking over my notes, there isn’t much here that doesn’t apply to ALL of us with any kind of online connection.

In order to follow Jesus’ call to be salt and light, and applying it to online life, I’d like to take a look at several dangers of the dark side of online life, as well as suggest ways to be wise in the use of this technology.

The Comparison Trap

I don’t think anything has fueled the temptation to compare ourselves to others as much as social media. There is a wise saying that “Comparison is the thief of joy.”

This is where our feelings go when we’re caught in the comparison trap: to envy. To depression and anxiety.

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot. (Proverbs 14:30)

Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. (Proverbs 12:25)

The opposite of comparing is choosing contentment.

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)

Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

And one of the best ways to choose contentment is to train yourself to practice gratitude. Give thanks for what the Lord has allowed for you.

Whatever happens, give thanks, because it is God’s will in Christ Jesus that
you do this. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Dangers of Social Media Apps

One of the worst is Tiktok.

A 17 year old girl wrote: “The only thing worse that happened to me besides Tiktok was my family members dying . . . . I would spend countless hours crying in my bedroom repeatedly watching Tiktok, telling myself I wasn’t good enough.”

Another girl told of starving herself to look like the people Tiktok decides are acceptable.

Tiktok destroys people’s self-esteem. Millions of kids try to learn the dances to fit in or feel accepted.

There is a strong pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia presence, causing lots of girls to develop eating disorders because adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure.

The message on so many of the apps for girls is: If you want to be seen, heard, loved—show off your body. No one is valuing you for your heart or your mind or your passions, just your appearance. Just your body.

This is so dangerous! It’s a lie that a girl’s worth is in how pretty she is or how thin she is or how sexy she is.

A person’s worth is set by Jesus, who was willing to pay for each one of us with His life. He says, “I made you in My image, and that makes you infinitely valuable to begin with. Then I died for you, which proves you are infinitely valuable.” THAT is true worth. It’s set by Jesus Himself.

Many of the apps are also dangerous because sexual predators use them to trick kids and lure them into meeting, where bad things happen. So many victims of
sex trafficking are drawn in on social media.

Another way social media is dangerous is because there’s where so much cyber-bullying happens.

If you see someone being bullied, ask the Lord for help and be brave. Speak up and say, “That’s not okay.” There is power in just one voice! And report it to whatever authorities have to do with how you know the person, such as school, or church, or the neighborhood. Keep inviting Jesus into the situation and ask for supernatural help.

Another problem with TikTok in particular is a different kind of danger, concerning privacy and security.

One expert said, “Anytime Amazon, major banks, and the Department of Defense ban employees from using an app for security issues, it’s time for everyone to uninstall the app.”

You need to know that NOTHING you put on social media is private.

**Other Emotional Dangers**

The more time you spend online, the greater your risk of feeling isolated and taken to a dark place emotionally. Because of the pandemic’s lockdown, depression and loneliness are at an all-time high.

Scrolling your social media feeds contributes to feeling left out.

Too much social media leads to disconnection and loneliness, and feelings of social isolation. Too much social media makes us feel inadequate because of the comparison thing.

A 2018 study published in the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology revealed that those who limited their social media exposure to 30 minutes a day, reported
that their depression lifted and their loneliness improved. Social media activist Collin Karchner, founder of the “Save the Kids” movement, kept hearing from U.S. students that they reported feeling better immediately after deleting their social media apps!

Another aspect of spending too much time online is that it can cause difficulty engaging in conversations in real life. Which of course fuels the loneliness further.

**Purity**

Probably the MAJOR pitfall of the Internet is pornography.

The fastest growing consumer of porn is girls 15-30. I found one statistic that 70% of guys and 50% of girls struggle with a porn problem. I think it’s higher than that.

I understand that when apologist and speaker Josh McDowell offered a one-month discipleship program for Christian student leader, he learned that 100% of both guys and girls confessed to problems with porn.

Brain chemicals are released when viewing pornography and during sexual experiences. These brain chemicals are intended to bond husband and wife like emotional superglue, but when people use porn, they bond to the porn instead of an actual person.

This is a matter of spiritual warfare. The enemy of our souls is taking captive millions of Christians through pornography, then beating them up with shame and guilt.

I plead with you, install a filter or an accountability program on your phone to help you stand against this attack on your purity.

And please, don’t take pictures of your bodies. And most certainly do not send any
pictures of body parts to other people!

You were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:4)

Your body was bought by Jesus and it belongs to Him. It’s not okay to give it away, even in pictures, to anyone except the person you have married.

What would being WISE look like, then?

First, recognize that this is a huge issue, especially in the Philippines. People in your country spend more time online than any other country in the world—almost 11 hours a day. You also spend more time on social media, over four hours, than any other country—twice the worldwide average.

It would be wise to choose to unplug yourselves so you can replenish your mental, emotional, and spiritual resources.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, “If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.”

There has to be a choice to deny ourselves and say NO to the phone as a way of saying YES to Jesus.

Think about all the ways you stay tethered to your phone so it controls you.

Get a real alarm clock and watch so you’re not dependent on your phone to tell you what time it is.

At night, recharge your phone in another room so your sleep won’t be disturbed by the sound and light of incoming messages and notifications.
Don’t post on social media when you’re emotional. Don’t treat social media like a diary. Then you won’t regret emotional posting that embarrasses you later.

If you’re already feeling down, don’t scroll social media. It will make you feel even worse.

To be emotionally healthy, let yourself feel your feelings instead of distracting yourself by scrolling.

Put your phone down and be 100% mindful of what’s happening in your life at that moment.

The blue light from screens decreases your melatonin levels, which leads to sleep problems. Turn off your screen an hour before bed to help yourself sleep better.

**Love One Another**

Before you post anything, ask:

- Is it true?
- Is it helpful?
- Is it kind?
- Will it cause drama?
- Am I posting this for the right reason?
- Would my grandmother want to see this?
- Is it mine to share?
- Would I say this or share this in real life?
- Does this glorify God?

Can you see how passing your post through the filter of these insightful questions would be loving?

**The Big Picture**
There are two verses that strike me as especially appropriate to this issue:

   Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)

   So then, whether you eat or drink OR WHATEVER YOU DO, do it all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

If that is the question we ask: “Will this bring glory to God?” we will find ourselves being loving, kind, respectful Christ-followers who are bringing salt and light into the dark and corrupt world of the internet.

And we will earn the Lord’s accolade: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/salt-and-light-online/ on May 17, 2022.

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Mind Games Camp (radio transcript)

Sue Bohlin

There’s one thing we do here at Probe that is my favorite part of ministry. Our Student 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 secluded—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 Islam, a compassionate but biblical view of homosexuality, 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’ll be talking about Mind Games in this article, but you can go to our website, Probe.org/mindgames, 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 lecturers, 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,
speaking on the Biology of Human Uniqueness, LGBT, Islam, and Nietzsche for Beginners:

**Dr. Ray Bohlin:**

Fire is also necessary for creating tools, particularly metal tools. You have to be able to heat metals to a really high temperature: copper, silver, gold—all their melting temperatures are over a thousand degrees centigrade. So you have to get a really hot fire to do that, and to be able to make the tools liquid, to make them malleable. So you’ve got not only to be able to make a fire, you have to be intentional as to how you make a really hot fire.

**Sue Bohlin:**

What I really love is my title for this, which is “Grace and Truth About Homosexuality,” because I think we need both. We need to be coming from a heart of compassion and sympathy and understanding for the sexual and relational brokenness that results in homosexuality, but we also need to be absolutely camped out on the truth of the Word of God.

**Paul Rutherford:**

The third of the five pillars of Islam is the giving of alms, what they call zakat. It’s much similar to Christian charity, to giving to a church or giving to the poor; Muslims likewise have a heart for their community, have a heart for those who are down and out. This is the giving to “the least of these,” as Christians might call it. The fourth pillar of Islam is Ramadan, and Ramadan is a fast. It is a month-long fast. This is a time when they train themselves in discipline, of practicing not eating during the day, and when they train themselves in increasing their desire for God, for Allah.

**Todd Kappelman:**

Adolph Hitler, when he was coming to power after 1939, he ordered just crates
and crates and crates of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and would give to his captains and his commanders and everything, and we believe by this action in some of Hitler’s own words that he saw himself to be the inheritor of much of Nietzsche’s philosophy and especially the aspect of the overman, the great world historical figure that Nietzsche is going to advocate for solving some of the problems that he’s going to look at.

### Comments from Alumni, Part 1

In this article we’re talking about our memorable, life-impacting, week-long summer Mind Games conference. But you don’t have to take our word for it. Consider what some of our alumni have to say.

Here’s three-time alumnus, Noah:

*Mind Games is a fun place of fellowship, you get a lot of excitement, there’s a ropes course that you go on so there’s a lot of excitement there, you do a lot of team-building activities, it’s a ton of fun, you get to learn a whole lot about life, about faith, about people, about relationships. You get to experience a whole new world of things that you’ve never experienced before in the faith. A lot of people, they just have a surface-level faith, but here at Mind Games we go a whole lot deeper into that faith, we lay it out and we explain philosophically how it works, reasonably how it works, how it works with science, how it works with other people, how it works with suffering, how it works with everything, just how the world works with faith.*

Here’s Esther:

*My faith before Mind Games was a little crazy . . . I had thoughts about suicide a few times, and then I started to doubt, “Is God even there?” Like, if He was there, then wouldn’t I feel His presence? Then I came to Mind Games and I was like, there’s no way He’s not real. For someone who hasn’t been here, Mind Games is a
great experience. You not only gain friends and family, but you learn more about God and how to stay stronger in your faith.

Tyler had a major shift between his first and second time at Mind Games:

I’m Tyler Lord from Athens, Georgia. Last year when I came I was actually agnostic, so I didn’t really know. But kinda having experiences throughout the year after Mind Games and coming back, I’ve become a Christian. It’s lots of fun. You come and, you know, it’s not really all about religion. There’s a bunch of free time you get to play around. You come in, and you don’t really know what to expect, When you get here and you think, oh, it’s gonna be a bunch of lectures, but it’s really not. You get a good bond with everybody’s who’s here, like the other campers. And even though there are lectures, they’re really interesting. The apologetics ones are great for like if someone comes up to you and they’re like, “Why are you a Christian?”

Comments From Alumni, Part 2

Here are a few more alumni comments, starting with Arty:

Mind Games is a wonderful time of fellowship, worship and just gaining a lot of knowledge into why Christianity is reasonable, how Christianity can work with science, how your faith and science can work together and not against each other. Mind Games is fun, it’s very much about the relationships that you build, it’s about the people who you interact with on a daily basis for the week.

This was Anya’s second time through:

After this second round of Mind Games, I feel like I’ve grown much more as a person, not just due to time but also how much Mind Games has affected me personally, If I had to describe Mind Games to someone who’s never been here before, I would say it’s something that completely blows your mind away. Not in
the sense that it’s all weighing over your head, but just how much they describe, how much detail and information you have on how to defend your faith. First year it was amazing, and second year it got even better.

Ben also returned:

Well it’s really that the first Mind Games for me was like planting the seed, this time it’s nurturing the plant. It was really so I could re-establish what they had taught me last year, cause last year was such an eye-opener I wanted to see if either I could experience that or build upon it this year, which I have.

Amy set a record of coming to Mind Games!

My name is Amy Klaschus, I’m from Orlando Florida, and I’ve been to Mind Games five times now! What keeps me coming back to Mind Games is the people, because I love the teachers—they’re very nice and they’re always willing to help and answer questions. Every year there have been at least a few people among the students who are just so welcoming and so Christian in a way I can’t really find back home as much. I know that in shaping my growth in faith, Mind Games has been just completely essential, because it’s given me the perspective and the ability to think biblically about all the problems I face, all the problems I faced in high school and now all the problems I’ve been facing this past year of college.

**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 twenty 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 lecture 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.

The Student Mind Games Camp is 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 our Web site, Probe.org/mindgames, 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.

Note

1. Steve Cable, Is This the Last Christian Generation? probe.org/is-this-the-last-christian-generation/
Why I Love to Learn I’m Wrong

Sue Bohlin

Years ago Sue Bohlin decided to embrace correction without defensiveness. Here’s why.

As the webmistress for Probe.org, I love getting emails alerting me to typos, either in the content of our articles or the coding that keeps people from seeing or hearing what they are looking for. I love being able to fix mistakes; there’s a deeply satisfying sense of, “Ohhhh that’s better!”

I want to get things right. I want to set things right. I want to BE right.

That could certainly be about sinful pride, but there’s another side to it. I love truth, that which corresponds to reality. If I am mistaken—or worse, misled—about something, I love learning about it so I can shift, bringing my beliefs or my position into alignment with what is true and right.

Originally I titled this post “Why I Love to Be Wrong,” but that’s not really correct. What I love is “the a-ha moment” of discovering I had been believing something other than what’s true, and welcoming correction, so I can adjust and
pivot.

One of the major reasons my church’s Women’s Bible Study teaching is so good, by the grace of God, is that the teaching team gathers on Mondays for the run-through of that week’s teacher. Each teacher commits to check her ego at the door and choose to gratefully receive input and advice about how to improve an explanation or illustration, or correct what is off-base or potentially confusing. It takes humility to receive constructive criticism, which runs the gamut from “you can make that better” to “you are wrong here.” But being willing to receive that kind of feedback fueled by love and mutual respect makes the whole teaching team improve.

Years ago I heard a word of wisdom: *all defensiveness is fleshly*. Defensiveness is the instant desire to protect oneself from the shame of feeling criticized or dishonored. It can look like deflecting the comment with something like, “You do it too!” It can look like denying whatever is said: “No, you’re wrong. I didn’t do/say/intend that.” It can look like shutting down emotionally. Defensiveness is a reaction to the message of “you’re wrong” or “you’re not okay.” But we can choose to lay down our impulse to defend ourselves and trust God with it. Wise and godly people have counseled others on how to respond to criticism: ask if it’s true; if it’s valid, admit it and change your ways. If it’s not valid, recognize that sometimes you’ll be misunderstood, so let it go and trust God.

I loved discovering Proverbs 12:1 in the NIV: “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid.” That means that our attitude toward correction—being told or shown we are wrong—is completely our choice, and *we can choose to love correction*.

So I do. Years ago I pre-decided to welcome being shown where I’m wrong.

Which is why I consider disillusionment a gift.

If we discover we have been buying an illusion, embracing disillusionment means
moving beyond illusion into reality, which is always a good thing, right?

In the video series “The Truth Project,” Dr. Del Tackett teaches what he calls the Cosmic Battle: “The battle between God’s Truth and the lies and illusions of the world, the flesh and the devil. The arguments and pretensions that set themselves up against the knowledge of God, against His nature and His word.” Ever since Genesis 3, earth has been a battleground for truth vs. lies and illusions.

Illusions are the air we breathe, the water we swim in, here on Battleground Earth.

So when we discover yet another illusion we have unthinkingly embraced, it is a gift to be able to reject the illusion and embrace the truth.

I have rejected a number of illusions ranging from the almost ridiculous to the eternally important.

*Almost ridiculous:* I had been under the illusion that camping was the only way to enjoy a budget vacation. I hate sleeping in tents or even a camper. Even more, I especially hate having to walk a block to get to a bathroom. But then I discovered the delightful truth that cruising is a way to experience luxury on a budget, with my own bathroom, and other people cooking and cleaning and entertaining me for less than $100 a day. Such a marvelous disillusionment!

*Eternally important:* As a college student, I realized that I had believed the lie that the vibrant religion of first-century Christianity was long dead and unavailable, having been replaced by empty ritual and repetition. The TRUTH was that biblical Christianity—being indwelled by God Himself because I have trusted in Christ—was very much alive and supernatural, becoming the source of unimaginable joy that just keeps getting better and better the longer I walk with Him. Such a wonderful disillusionment!

*The most recent big disillusionment:* At the beginning of the pandemic, I
embraced the messaging that age 65+ people like me were at grave risk and needed to stay home. I was pretty much terrified, equating this new virus to the horrors of the Bubonic Plague. When I told my nurse friend, whom I had promised I would visit in her home, that I needed to protect myself inside my own home, she asked, “What about the Christians in the Middle Ages who were the hands and feet of Jesus to the people with the plague? What if they had stayed inside and hid? Who’s going to take care of the first responders and the others who don’t have a choice to stay home if not the Christians?”

Whoa. In a moment, the cloud of fear that had enveloped me—which I came to realize was an illusion meant to hold me hostage—dissipated. I remembered Psalm 139, “All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.” I would not, and will not, die before the day God has ordained. One of our elders reminded me that Jesus had asked, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life’s span?” (Matthew 6:27)

I started visiting my friend on Saturdays for over a year, and she told me that I was the only person other than her patients who would touch her. Emotionally, like millions of others, she was dying from isolation and rejection. It was such a joy for me to live in the freedom that disillusionment had brought.

Because I was really, really glad to learn I was wrong.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/why-i-love-to-learn-im-wrong/ on April 19, 2022.
Sue Bohlin provides helpful information for use in helping sharpen the question-asking skills of fellow believers as well as in evangelism. These “understanding questions” help Christians sharpen their biblical worldview and help unbelievers delve into the inconsistencies of their own worldview.

Dr. Jeff Myers of Bryan College and Summit Ministries shares our passion for helping others develop a biblical worldview. One of the tools he offers in developing critical thinking skills is how to use the right question at the right time.

He suggests four “killer questions” to help anyone think critically. The first question is, What do you mean by that? In other words, define your terms. The second question is, Where do you get your information? The third is, How do you know that’s true?, and the fourth killer question is, What if you’re wrong?

Dr. Myers tells this story:

“A friend took a group of third graders to the Denver Museum of Natural History.

“Before he took them inside, he knelt down on their level and said, ‘Kids, if anybody in this museum tells you anything, I want you to ask them, how do you
know that’s true?’ Giving this question to a third grader is the intellectual equivalent of giving them a surface-to-air missile. These kids walked into the museum; all they knew was, Ask: How do you know that’s true?

“A paleontologist was going to show them how to find a fossil. Apparently they had intentionally buried a fossil down in the soil sample and she said, ‘We’re going to find it.’ Very clever, right? No, not with this crowd. ‘Cause they started asking questions like, ‘Well, how do you know there’s a fossil down in there?’ ‘Well, because we just know there’s a fossil down there.’ ‘Why do you want to find it?’ ‘Well, because we want to study it.’ ‘Why do you want to study it?’ ‘We want to find out how old it is.’ ‘Well, how old do you think it is?’ ‘About 60 million years old.’

‘Lady, how do you know that is true?’”

“She patronized them. She said, ‘Well, you see, I’m a scientist, I study these things, I just know that.’ They said, ‘Well, how do you know that’s true?’ Anytime she said anything at all they just asked, ‘How do you know that’s true?’ What happened next proves that truth is stranger than fiction. She threw down her tools, glared at these children, and said, ‘Look, children, I don’t know, OK? I just work here!’”[2]

**Question #1: What do you mean by that?**

The first question is, *What do you mean by that?* You want to get the other person to define his terms and explain what he is saying. If you don’t make sure you understand what the other person means, you could end up having a conversation using the same words but meaning very different things.

When I was a new believer, I was approached on the street by some people collecting money for a ministry to young people. I asked, naively, “Do you teach about Jesus?” They said, rather tentatively, “Yesss. . . .” I gave them some money and asked for their literature (which was in the reverse order of what I should
have done). Only later did I learn that they did indeed teach about Jesus—that He was the brother of Satan! I wish I had had this first killer question back then. I would have asked, “What do you teach about Jesus? Who is He to you?”

Get the other person’s definition. Let’s say you’re talking to a neighbor who says, “I don’t believe there is a God.” Don’t quarrel with him: “Oh yes there is!” “No, there’s not.” Second Timothy 2:24-25 says not to quarrel with anyone. Just start asking questions instead. “What do you mean by ‘God’? What’s your understanding of this God who isn’t there?” Let him define that which does not exist! You may well find out that the god he rejects is a mean, cold, abusive god who looks a lot like his father. In that case, you can assure him that you don’t believe in that god either. The true God is altogether different. If it were me, at this point I wouldn’t pursue the existence of God argument, but rather try to understand where the other person is coming from, showing the compassion and grace of God to someone bearing painful scars on his soul.

Let’s say someone says she is for a woman’s right to choose abortion. You can ask, “What do you mean by ‘woman’? Only adult women? What if the baby is a girl, what about her right to choose? What do you mean by ‘right’? Where does that right come from?” Do you see how asking What do you mean by that? can expose problems in the other person’s perspective?

**Question #2: Where do you get your information?**

The question Where do you get your information? is particularly important in today’s culture, where we drown in information from a huge array of sources. Information is being pumped at us from TV, radio, music, Websites, email, blogs, billboards, movies, and conversations with people who have no truth filters in place at all. Consider the kind of responses you could get to the question, Where do you get your information?

“I heard it somewhere.” Well, how’s that for reliable? Follow with another killer
question, How do you know it’s true?

“Everybody says so.” That may be so, but is it true? If you say something loud enough, often enough, and long enough, people will believe it’s true even if it isn’t. For example, “everybody says” people are born gay. Doesn’t everybody know that by now? That’s what we hear, every day, but where is the science to back up that assertion? Turns out, there is none. Not a shred of proof that there is a gay gene.

Someone else may say, “I read it somewhere.” So ask, in a legitimate newspaper or magazine? Or in a tabloid? Elvis is not alive, and you can’t lose twenty-five pounds in a week. You might have read it somewhere, but there is a word for that kind of writing: fiction.

Did you see it on the internet? That could be a single individual with great graphics abilities pumping out his own totally made-up stuff. Or it could be a trustworthy, legitimate website like Probe.org.

Did you see it on TV? Who said it, and how trustworthy is the source? Was it fact, or opinion? Be aware of the worldview agenda behind the major media outlets. Former CBS reporter Bernard Goldberg exposed the leftist leanings of the media in his book Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News. Most of what you see on TV is what the Bible calls “the world,” and we are to be discerning and skeptical of the values and information it pumps out.

Don’t be fooled by someone sounding confident and self-assured. Many people feel confident without any basis for feeling that way. Ask, Where do you get your information? It’s a great killer question.

Question #3: How do you know that’s true?

The third killer question is, How do you know that’s true? This is probably the most powerful question of them all. It puts the burden of proof on the other
person.

Most people aren’t aware of what they assume is true; there’s simply no other way to see the world. They often believe what they believe without asking if it’s true, if it aligns with reality. If you respectfully ask killer questions like How do you know that’s true?, all of a sudden it can begin to occur to folks that what they believe, they believe by faith. But where is their faith placed?

Sometimes, the kindest thing we can do for people is gently shake up their presuppositions and invite them to think.

The reigning philosophy in science today is materialism, the insistence that the physical universe is all that exists. Something is only real if it can be measured and quantified. We need to ask, How do you know there is nothing outside the matter-space-time-energy continuum? How do you know that the instruments of physical measurement are the only ones that matter? How do you know there isn’t something non-physical, which cannot be measured with physical measuring tools? If all you have is a ruler, how do you measure weight? (And if all you have is a ruler, and someone wants to talk about weight, it would be easy to deny there is such a thing as weight, only height and length, a lot like the materialists’ insistence that since we can’t measure the supernatural, it doesn’t exist.)

At the heart of the debate over stem cell research is the question of the personhood of a human embryo. Those who insist that it’s not life until implantation need to be asked, How do you know that’s true? It’s genetically identical to the embryo ten minutes before implantation. How do you know those are only a clump of cells and not a human being?

Postmodern thought says that no one can know truth. This philosophy has permeated just about every college campus. To the professor who asserts, “No one can know truth,” a student should ask, How do you know that’s true? If that sounds slightly crazy to you, good! A teacher who says there is no truth, or that if there is, no one can know it, says it because he or she believes it to be true, or
they wouldn’t be saying it!

We get hostile email at Probe informing us of how stupid and biased we are for believing the Bible, since it has been mistranslated and changed over the centuries and it was written by man anyway. When I ask, “How do you know this is true?”, I don’t get answers back. Putting the burden of proof on the other person is quite legitimate. People are often just repeating what they have heard from others. But we have to be ready to offer a defense for the hope that is in us as well.{3}. Of course, when we point to the Bible as our source of information, it’s appropriate to ask the killer question, “How do you know that’s true?” Fortunately, there is a huge amount of evidence that today’s Bible is virtually the same as the original manuscripts. And there is strong evidence for its supernatural origins because of things like fulfilled prophecy. Go to the “Reasons to Believe” section of Probe.org for a number of articles on why we can trust that the Bible is really God’s word.

There are a lot of mistaken, deceived people who believe in reincarnation and insist they remember their past lives. Shirley MacLaine claims to have been a Japanese Geisha, a suicide in Atlantis, an orphan raised by elephants, and the seducer of Charlemagne.{4}. Here’s where this killer question comes in. If you lose your life memories when you die, how do you know your past lives are real? When you’re born into a new body and your slate is wiped clean, how do you know it’s you?

So many people have embraced a pragmatic, expedient standard of, “Hey, it works for me.” “It works for me to cheat on my taxes, as long as I don’t get caught.” “It works for me to spend hours on porn sites late at night since my wife doesn’t know how to check the computer’s history.” “It works for me to keep God in his corner of the universe while I do my own thing; I’ll get religious later in life.” Well, how do you know it works? You haven’t seen the whole, big picture. You can’t know the future, and you can’t know how tomorrow’s consequences will be reaped from today’s choices.
Let me add a caveat here. The underlying question behind *How do you know that’s true?* is really, “Why should I believe you?” It can be quite disconcerting to be challenged this way, so be sure to ask with a friendly face and without an edge in your voice.

**Question #4: What if you’re wrong?**

One benefit of this question is that it helps us not to “sweat the small stuff.” There are a lot of issues where it just doesn’t matter a whole lot if we’re wrong. If you’re agonizing over a restaurant menu, trying to figure out the best entree, what if you’re wrong? It doesn’t matter. You can probably come back another time. If you can’t, because you’re traveling and you’ll never have another chance, is it going to wreck your life? Absolutely not.

Many of our youth (and, sadly, adults as well) believe that having sex is just part of being social. Many of them believe that sex qualifies as recreation, much like going to an amusement park. They need to be challenged: *What if you’re wrong?* Besides the high probability of contracting a number of sexually transmitted diseases, there is the ongoing heartache of the discovery that “casual” sex isn’t, because of its lasting impact on the heart.

The ultimate question where this matters is, *What do you believe about God?* What do you do with Jesus’ statement “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by Me”? What if you believe there is no God, or that you can live however you want and God will let you into heaven because you’re not a mass murderer? We need to ask, *What if you’re wrong?* You will be separated from God forever!

It’s only fair for Christ-followers to ask that of ourselves. What if we’re wrong? What if we’re actually living an illusion that there is a God and a purpose to life? I would say, “You know what? I still lived a great life, full of peace and purpose and fulfillment. Ultimately, if there were no God, it wouldn’t matter—nothing would
matter at all!—but I still loved my life. Either way, if I’m right or I’m wrong, I win.”

These four killer questions are powerful to spark meaningful conversation and encourage yourself, and others, to think critically. Use them wisely, be prepared for some interesting conversations . . . and have fun!

Notes

1. Our fellow worldview apologist Bill Jack of Worldview Academy (www.worldview.org) has also popularized these “killer questions,” but they go back all the way to Socrates.
3. 1 Peter 3:15.
4. www.fortunecity.com/emachines/e11/86/duncan2.html

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Is God Still Doing Miracles?

Sue Bohlin
I asked Cara Polsley, author of the forthcoming book The Bible and the Holographic Universe, to share her faith-building story that encourages me to ask big, bold prayers of a God who is still willing to do the miraculous.

Dr. Cynthia “Cara” Polsley is a writer, researcher, teacher, and speaker. An alumna of the University of Kansas (Classics), she received her Ph.D. in Classics (Classical Philology) from Yale University, with a background in Greek and Latin languages and linguistics, ancient civilization and history, and literature. Her work emphasizes social commentary, narratology, and the inerrancy and intricacy of the Bible. A spinal cord injury survivor and blogger at www.cpolsley.com, she is author of the science fiction series Ifscapes and manager/co-founder of the tech start-up Cordical LC.

“He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen” (Deut. 10:21, NKJV).

Moses spoke these words to Israel over 3,000 years ago. Fast-forwarding to today, I understand what he means. We don’t always notice God moving. After all, not everyone crosses a sea on dry land or drinks water from a rock. But God is the same God, still doing miracles. When He does, it’s a praise to share them.

That’s why it’s a praise to give you a glimpse of what the Lord has done for my family since a car accident almost killed us and left me paralyzed in 2013.
It was a beautiful summer day with barely a cloud in the sky, a perfect day for a family gathering. Seven of us were driving home on the highway. We’d had car trouble and were being followed miles behind by my father in a tow truck, but otherwise, it had been a happy morning.

The accident happened in an instant. A distracted driver began speeding. “That guy’s going to hit us,” my brother remembers thinking. The car rammed our bumper and sent our SUV flipping. We flipped about eight times before landing upside-down nearby. My oldest brother rolled onto the pavement. He was on his feet immediately, running after us. Even though he had been thrown out at fifty-five miles an hour, he was only scratched and bruised. Responding officers were incredulous. “Really, how’d you get here?” one asked. Today, my brother has a small scar on his arm.

Our youngest brother was also tossed out on impact. Fully aware, he stood up and walked around shakily until he felt dizzy. At the hospital, doctors found that his lower back had been broken and had then fused together on the spot. After a brief stint in ICU, he was released. He’s now a thriving researcher, teacher, and graduate student, always on the go.

Our niece and nephew, five and three, were still fastened in their seats beside the broken windows. Neither child was admitted to the hospital or had any substantial injuries, even though my nephew spent several months blaming every bug bite and bruise on the accident.

God wasn’t done. My father observed that photographs revealed a “bubble of protection” around my mother’s place in the driver’s seat. The glass and steering wheel in front of her was intact. Her neck and wrist were broken, and she had sustained a severe concussion. After some time in ICU and months of occupational therapy, Mom returned to a busy life working and being an exceptional wife, mother, and grandmother. Her hands dance across the piano keyboard without a trace of injury, much less of a shattered wrist.
My sister-in-law, riding in the passenger seat, had four breaks in her arm. She was told that she would require surgery and that the arm would never be normal again. Four days later, she was in such terrible pain that she went to the local hospital. Her doctor “happened” to be leaving as she entered the ER, and was able to arrange rapid X-rays.

The orthopedic specialist soon came into the room and began unwrapping her arm. “What are you doing?” she exclaimed. “This arm has never been broken,” he said. “And I want to ask you, who grabbed your arm in the accident?” Her elbow bore a bruise shaped like a handprint with thumb and fingers from the outside, as if someone had clasped her elbow. No human had. We’d all been conscious; her window had been unbroken, and she’d crawled out without help.

I was thrown from the car and landed face-down in the grass. My lungs had collapsed. I couldn’t breathe and couldn’t feel my legs. There was an obvious spinal cord injury. An EMS worker named Luke—like the doctor in the Bible—“happened” to be driving home from work and stopped to help. He had special training in spinal injuries and called for a LifeFlight. I can honestly say that I had no fear in the accident or its aftermath. Jesus was with us every step of the way. “God, be with me,” I prayed, knowing He was.

Doctors said that if I survived 6+-hour surgery, I’d never walk again. My spinal cord had been severed. On a respirator, I couldn’t communicate until my sister-in-law interpreted my clumsy letters in sign language. Thankfully, my hands were uninjured, but my neck, back, and ribs had been crushed. Taking a breath, lifting a cup of water, sitting up—everything took effort.

At the end of in-patient rehabilitation, with a lot of assistance, I took six small steps at the parallel bars. Those steps justified out-patient therapy. However, therapists soon determined that the progress was insufficient. “You’ll grow old in a wheelchair,” a well-meaning physical therapist said. “You may see small changes, but they won’t be significant.” Without significant changes, we had a
problem. My Ph.D.’s first year had ended with a literal bang. Within the year, I had to resume studies or forfeit my fellowship at an Ivy League program halfway across the country. Additionally, every day off my feet threatened blood pressure issues, worse osteoporosis, and reduced function. How could school happen?

On January 1, 2014, God gave the idea of standing leaning against the kitchen sink (not recommended here). The first day, I stood propped against the counter for four minutes. Three months later, I’d worked up to fourteen hours a day, and was approved for knee-locking leg braces like those used by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Reviewers initially denied the request, but our clinician insisted on letting us try. While waiting, I practiced inching backward with full-length ACL braces and a rolling walker built by my father. A month later, I could go forward with actual braces.

In August 2014, living on prayer and family collaboration, Dad and I made the three-day drive back to school. I couldn’t get up or down from a chair, shuffle to campus in less than an hour, lift a laptop, or carry a book. However, the disabilities office and my academic department were part of God’s provision through countless obstacles. What they could not do, we innovated and prayed to accomplish. They provided a mobility scooter for transportation, placed a podium in each classroom so that I could stand during class, and arranged additional scanning on request through the library. Using a lightweight backpack with safety straps, I managed to carry a computer tablet that weighed about three pounds.

By spring, I was living independently with morning and evening support. One day, bringing home coursework that included a paper facsimile of a certain Egyptian artifact, I texted a photo to my parents: “I just carried the Rosetta Stone!” The rigorous schedule combined teaching, classes, Ph.D. exams, and lectures—academic life—with demands of self-therapy at the gym, sleepless nights, health struggles, and, unwittingly, a broken ankle. But I was singing, loving how God was making things possible. “You believe in God,” a puzzled unbelieving friend observed, “and He is healing you.”
Two examples of His provision. On a high-nutrition diet, I prayed for fish and eggs. The cafeteria, open for select meals on weekdays, served more fish and eggs than usual that week. Later, realizing that the fridge held extra supplies, I randomly opened my Bible to Luke 11:11-13, reading, “[I]f (a son shall) ask a fish, will (his father) for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?” Another time, I fell at 3 a.m. No one was nearby. Pulling the wall-mounted emergency cord would summon noisy firetrucks. I asked the Lord to preserve the testimony by helping me onto my feet. To this day, it’s a mystery how I got up from the floor.

Christmas 2015 brought a devastating setback. We discovered that my leg was, as doctors said, “impressively” broken due to SCI-induced osteoporosis. After extensive surgery, I wrote my dissertation prospectus lying in bed with an external metal fixator bolted to the bones of my right leg. The leg recovered better than expected.

On the day that I was preparing to travel back to school, I fell. My left leg was now clearly broken. While God hadn’t prevented surgery on the right leg, we prayed. This was it. If He didn’t intervene, there wasn’t enough medical leave left in the Ph.D. program. If God wanted me to finish, He had to make a way.

We prayed for five minutes. At the end, my knee was completely healed, as if nothing had happened. After an hour, we got in the car and were on the road.

Ultimately, the Lord guided through the remainder of the Ph.D. Although officials were too nervous to have me walk across the stage during graduation ceremonies, I walked across it before the diploma ceremony began. It was all Jesus.

I still do hours of walking with braces each day, and am still paralyzed. Nothing is what you would call normal. I believe more is coming, and pray and work toward it, as God wills. Meanwhile, He’s opened doors for writing, teaching, speaking, and more. He continues to do miracles. Though they are not always as expected,
His glory and His mercy are everywhere. Sometimes He makes our dependency plainer than others. In those times, it’s especially humbling. Still, isn’t salvation the greatest miracle, and isn’t abundant Christian life meant to testify to God’s glory (Col. 3:23-24)?

As Moses said, God is all about “great and awesome things.” I praise Him for the opportunity to share some wonders that these eyes have seen, and pray that my story, His story, encourages you to watch for Him actively every day—and to realize that He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/is-god-still-doing-miracles/ on March 15, 2022.

What God Says About Sex - A Christian Perspective on Human Sexuality

Sue Bohlin

Sue Bohlin provides us a succinct Christian perspective on human sexuality. She points out that God created sex and has a purpose for it defined within the context of marriage. When we lose sight of God’s perspective, sex can degrade
into a pastime for pleasure that will ultimately hurt us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The Pickle Principle

It’s not surprising that in a time of growing biblical illiteracy, so few people have any idea what God thinks and says about the extremely important subject of sex. The world holds the Christian view of sex in contempt, considering it prudish, naïve and repressive. But the Bible elevates sexuality as God’s gift to us that is both sacred and mysterious. The world’s perspective degrades it to just something that feels good—another form of recreation or socialization.

Counselor Waylon Ward offers an insightful way to understand the problem, which he calls “the Pickle Principle.” In order to make pickles, we put cucumbers in a brine solution of vinegar, spices, and water. After a cucumber soaks in the brine long enough, it is changed into a pickle. Most of us are like pickles. We sit in the brine of a sex-saturated culture, absorbing its values and beliefs, and it changes the way we think. Even most Christians are pickled today, believing and acting exactly like everyone else who has been sitting in the brine of a culture hostile to God and His Word.

The world’s sex-saturated brine includes the belief that sex is the ultimate pleasure. The message of much TV, movies, and music is that there is no greater pleasure available, and that it is the right of every individual, even teenagers, to have this pleasure. Another aspect of this pickling process is the belief that no one has the right to deprive anyone else of this greatest of all human pleasures, that no one has the right to tell anyone else what is right or wrong about the expression of his or her sexuality.

If the purpose and goal of sex is primarily pleasure, then other people are just objects to be used for sensual gratification. Since people are infinitely valuable
because God made us in His image, that is a slap in the face whether we realize it or not. The Christian perspective is that the purpose of sex is relational, with pleasure as the by-product. The Bible teaches that sex welds two souls together. It is so powerful that it is only safe within a committed, covenant marriage relationship. It’s like the difference between the wild energy of lightning compared to the harnessed power of electricity. God knew what He was doing when He limited sex to within marriage!

God wants to get His “pickled people” out of the world’s brine and into an intimate relationship with Him. He wants to change our thinking and beliefs to be in alignment with His.

**Sex is God’s Invention! The Purpose of Sex**

Sex is God’s idea. He made it not only efficient for making babies, but pleasurable and deeply satisfying. He designed men’s and women’s body parts to complement each other. He created hormones to make everything work right and make us want to be sexual. Unlike animals, whose mating behavior is purely instinctive for the purpose of reproducing, human sexuality has several wonderful purposes. God means for all of them to be contained within marriage.

In a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between husband and wife, we can express and enjoy God’s two major purposes to sex: fruitfulness and intimacy. His first command to Adam and Eve was to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28); one very foundational purpose of sex is to create new living beings. Fruitfulness is not limited to having children, though. A mutually loving and serving sexual relationship between husband and wife can produce emotional and personal fruitfulness as well. Both people are nurtured to grow, develop, and soar, becoming more of what God means them to be.

The other big purpose for sex, emotional and physical intimacy, is only possible within marriage. In his little gem of a book called *What God Says About Sex*,
Eric Elder says that intimacy really means “into-me-see.” It is only safe to reveal the fullness of who we are, “warts and all,” to someone who loves us and has committed to be faithful and supportive “till death do us part.” The fullest experience and freedom of sex is found within the marriage bed, which God says to keep holy or set apart.\(^5\) God says that we are to use self-control to keep all expressions of sexuality limited to marriage.\(^6\)

Sex also builds oneness, a mystical union of two lives and souls into one life together. The one-flesh union of sex is a picture of the way two souls are joined together into a shared life. In fact, we could say that sex is like solder that is used to fuse two pieces of metal together. Once they are joined, it is a strong bond that helps keep marriages and families intact, which is God’s intention for our lives. Another purpose of sex is the pleasure that comes from being safe in another’s love. The entire book of Song of Solomon is gorgeous poetry that glorifies married sexual relations.

God also says that an important purpose of sex is to serve as an earthbound illustration of the mystical but real unity of Christ and the church, where two very different, very other beings are joined together as one. This spiritual component to sex is what helps us see more clearly why any and all sex outside of marriage falls far short of God’s intention for it to be holy and sacred—and protected.

**So . . . What Does God Actually Say?**

A lot of people believe the Bible says, “Sex is fun and it feels good, so don’t do it.” Nothing could be farther from the truth! Sex was God’s great idea in the first place! But God’s view of sex as a sacred and private gift to married couples, as well as a gift each spouse gives to the other, is at great odds with the world’s perspective of sex as simply a pleasure no one should deny him- or herself.

The overarching statement God makes is that sex is to be completely contained within marriage.\(^7\) As I said above, sex is so powerful that it’s like the difference
between the wild, uncontrollable power of lightning compared to the safety of harnessed electricity in our buildings. God wants us to harness the power of sex within marriage. This means that all other expressions of sexuality are off-limits, not because God is a cosmic killjoy, but because He loves us and knows what’s best for us, namely, not playing with lightning! So God says not to engage in sex with anyone before marriage, with anyone else once we are married, with anyone of the same sex; or with prostitutes, or with family members, or with animals.

God says that sexual purity is a treasure to be guarded and valued. It is a reflection of God’s own character, which is what makes it so valuable. In our culture, many people have been deceived into thinking that their virginity is worthless, something to get rid of. But God says it is special, a gift that can we only bestow on one person, one time. God calls us to purity after marriage as well by remaining faithful to our spouse. Purity before and during marriage prevents “ghosts” in the marriage bed; comparisons are nowhere as deadly as in the intensely intimate realm of sex. We glorify God in our sexuality by using self-control to stay pure if single, and by loving our spouse sexually if married.

The good news is that purity can be restored if we confess our sin and put our trust in Jesus to forgive us and give us a new, holy quality of life. The Bible promises, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God stands ready to forgive and cleanse us, and restore our purity the moment we ask.

God says that sex is to be reserved for adults only. Three times in the Song of Solomon, a beautiful book extolling the glory of married sex, it says, “Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires,” which means “until the time is right.” As I minister to sexually broken people, most of them bear the still-painful scars of childhood sexual abuse from people who never should have opened a door to sexual experience. Their entire view of sex has been warped and skewed. God never meant for children to be introduced to sex. It’s for adults. Married adults.
God wants us to actively fight sexual temptation. The battle is harder than it’s ever been because of our sex-saturated culture. He says to flee immorality. In fact, God says to offer not even a hint of sexual immorality. That means that it is a violation of His intentions to engage in phone sex with strangers, or virtual sex in chat rooms and porn sites. The fact that you’re not physically touching another person’s body doesn’t mean it’s not sin, because Jesus said that sexual sin happens in the mind first.

Eric Elder suggests asking a powerful question to help clarify the battle against sexual temptation: will this lead to greater intimacy and fruitfulness with the husband or wife God has created for me? This filter is helpful for both married people and singles. If an action doesn’t build intimacy or fruitfulness, it probably destroys them. Another question to ask is, Can I glorify God in what my flesh wants to do? Can I invite Jesus into what I’m about to do? If the answer is no, God invites us to meet the struggle with His supernatural energy instead of our own puny human strength.

Outside of the safety of marriage, sex is wounding and hurtful, but God created it for our pleasure and delight. In the Song of Solomon, God enthusiastically invites the newlyweds to enjoy His good gift of sex, where He says, “Eat, friends, and drink, o lovers!” In fact, God wants married couples to bless each other by enjoying sex often and regularly.

Are you surprised by what God says about sex?

Why Sexual Sin Hurts So Much

Pastors and counselors will tell you that there is a greater intensity of shame and pain in the people they counsel when the issues involve sexual sin. Paul says that all other sins are outside our bodies, but sexual sin touches you deep in your heart and soul.

As mentioned above, it may be helpful to think of sex like solder. God created it to
make a strong, powerful bond that creates healthy, stable families into which children are welcomed. But when people fuse their souls through sexual sin without the safety and commitment of marriage, it causes tremendous pain when the relationship rips apart. (Have you ever seen a broken weld? It’s pretty ugly.) When sex is disconnected from love and commitment, it also disconnects the body from the soul. This inflicts deep wounds of shame and guilt on a heart that has been used for gratification instead of love.

Waylon Ward says that sex sins expose and exploit our deepest emotional and spiritual vulnerabilities. He writes, “In the counseling office, individuals rarely if ever weep scalding tears about any other sense of loss like they do for a sexual relationship when it ends. There are soul ties that bind two partners together in unseen ways and there is a sense that part of you has been stolen. There is a hole in your soul where the connection was ripped from you.”[21]

The pickling brine of our culture’s increased sensuality says, “If it feels good, do it. You’re entitled.” But while this belief about sex may feel good, it is most definitely not good for us. Note the runaway epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases, and the resulting increase in infertility. Note the number of broken hearts and broken families. Note the alarming amount of sexual abuse. Note the soaring rates of depression, especially in teens, much of which is related to sexual activity outside of marriage.

God invented sex for His glory and our benefit. His basic rule—keep sex inside marriage—isn’t meant to be a killjoy, but to protect our hearts and bodies and relationships and families. He knows what He’s doing, and we do well to follow.

Notes


2. Ibid., 8.


6. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

7. There are 44 prohibitions of *porneia* (sexual expression outside of marriage, usually translated “sexual immorality”), just within the New Testament alone. This is where God draws the line between sex within marriage and sex outside of marriage, which determines what is sin and what is not.

8. Song of Solomon 4:12.

9. 1 John 1:9.


11. I have the privilege of serving with Living Hope Ministries ([www.livehope.org](http://www.livehope.org)), a support group for those dealing with unwanted same-sex attractions, and the families of those who struggle. (Or who don’t struggle because they are just fully immersed in a gay identity.) I mainly minister to women, for whom a history of sexual abuse has long been a common denominator.

12. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

13. Ephesians 5:3.


Sue Bohlin reflects on God’s question to Adam after he fell and broke the creation.

There is a most interesting interaction in Genesis 3 between Adam and God after the Fall, when Adam and Eve sinned by rebelling against God’s command not to
eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God calls to Adam, who is hiding among the trees of the Garden of Eden, “Where are you?” Adam explains, “…I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”

And the Lord God said, “Who told you that you were naked?” (3:11)

Hmmmm. Interesting question, one that Adam doesn’t answer.

The first thing the newly fallen man tells his Creator is that he was afraid, and he was naked. Up to this point, in a literally perfect world, there was no fear, and there were no clothes. How did he know to identify this new feeling of being afraid? And “naked” is the opposite of “clothed.” In a world without clothes, “naked” has no meaning, right?

When Adam says he was afraid because he was naked, my guess is that this was how he described the new, unwelcome feeling of shame: the horrible awareness of being very not-okay, of being vulnerable and embarrassed and exposed.

But I’ve been munching for days on the next question: “Who told you that you were naked?”

In Genesis 3:7, we read that as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, “Then the eyes of both of them opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” Apparently there was an immediate and awful awareness of a change, of something very very wrong.

(I personally think they might have been previously enveloped with light and glory. Psalm 104:2 tells us that God, who made them in His image, “covers himself with light as if it were a garment.” The moment they sinned, I think they lost their light.)

But God didn’t ask, “How did you know you were naked?” He asked, “Who told you that you were naked?”
There are only four characters in the garden: God, Adam, Eve . . . and the serpent, who we find out later is “the devil who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9).

So, although Adam doesn’t answer God’s question, it sure sounds to me like it was the nasty serpent.

And I wonder if that question is in the scriptures to direct us to pay attention to the voices that speak to us:

- Who told you that you were too much?
- Who told you that you were not enough?
- Who told you that you were fat?
- Who told you that you were ugly?
- Who told you that you were dumb?
- Who told you that you were incompetent?
- Who told you that you were a loser?
- Who told you that you were too old?
- Who told you that you were too young?

And now I’m seeing the pattern extend to the broken sexuality in our culture:

- Who told you that you were a boy in a girl’s body?
- Who told you that you were gay or lesbian or bisexual?
- Who told you that you were asexual or polyamorous?

Social media has given the enemy of our souls a megaphone for his devious, destructive lies.

I thank God for His clarifying question that is just as salient today as it was the day the creation broke at the Fall: “Who told you that you were _____?” We need to look beyond the message to the WHO behind it, the source of the voice planting doubt and lies in our souls.
And instead of listening to the voice of the one whose native tongue is lies (John 8:44), we should listen to the One who speaks loving truth to us about ourselves:

- You are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13)
- You are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14)
- You are blessed of the Father (Matthew 25:34)
- You are more valuable than many sparrows (Luke 12:7)
- You are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you (John 15:3)
- You are the branches (John 15:5)
- You are My friends (John 15:14)
- You are the called of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6)
- You are beloved of God (Romans 1:7)
- You are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- You are Christ’s body, and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:27)
- You are a letter of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:3)
- You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26)
- You are sons of light and sons of day (1 Thessalonians 5:5)
- You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)

Now when we hear, “Who told you that you are _____?” we can say, “YOU did, Lord! You told me in Your word!”
The Glory of Grace

Sue Bohlin

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.”

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. 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.” 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.”
Your Work Matters to God

Sue Bohlin

*Sue Bohlin helps us look at work from a biblical perspective. If we apply a Christian worldview to our concept of work, it takes on greater significance within the kingdom of God.*

Many Christians hold a decidedly unbiblical view of work. Some view it as a curse, or at least as part of the curse of living in a fallen world. Others make a false distinction between what they perceive as the sacred—serving God—and the secular—everything else. And others make it into an idol, expecting it to provide
them with their identity and purpose in life as well as being a source of joy and fulfillment that only God can provide.

In their excellent book *Your Work Matters to God*, Doug Sherman and William Hendricks expose the wrong ways of thinking about work, and explain how God invests work with intrinsic value and honor. Rick Warren echoes this idea in his blockbuster *The Purpose Driven Life* when he writes, “Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and perform it with an awareness of his presence.”

First, let’s explore some faulty views of work: the secular view, some inappropriate hierarchies that affect how we view work, and work as merely a platform for doing evangelism.

Those who hold a secular view of work believe that life is divided into two disconnected parts. God is in one spiritual dimension and work is in the other real dimension, and the two have nothing to do with each other. God stays in His corner of the universe while I go to work and live my life, and these different realms never interact.
One problem with this secular view is that it sets us up for disappointment. If you leave God out of the picture, you’ll have to get your sense of importance, fulfillment and reward from someplace else: work. Work is the answer to the question, “Who am I, and why am I important?” That is a very shaky foundation—because what happens if you lose your job? You’re suddenly a “nobody,” and you are not important because you are not employed.

The secular view of work tends to make an idol of career. Career becomes the number one priority in your life. Your relationship with God takes a back seat, family takes a back seat, even your relationship with other people takes a back seat to work. Everything gets filtered through the question, “What impact will this have on my career?”

The secular view of work leaves God out of the system. This is particularly unacceptable for Christians, because God calls us to make Him the center of our life.{3} He wants us to have a biblical worldview that weaves Him into every aspect of our lives, including work. He wants to be invited into our work; He wants to be Lord of our work.{4}

**Inappropriate Hierarchies: Soul/Body, Temporal/Eternal**

In this article, we’re examining some faulty views of work. One comes from believing that the soul matters more than the body. We can wrongly believe that God only cares about our soul, and our bodies don’t really matter. The body is not important, we can think: it is only temporal, and it will fade and die. But if that view were true, then why did God make a physical universe? Why did He put Adam and Eve in the garden to cultivate and keep it? He didn’t charge them with, “Go and make disciples of all nations which aren’t in existence yet, but they will be as soon as you guys go off and start making babies.” No, He said, “Here’s the garden, now cultivate it.” He gave them a job to do that had nothing to do with evangelism or church work. There is something important about our bodies, and
God is honored by work that honors and cares for the body—which, after all, is His good creation.

Another wrong way of thinking is to value the eternal over the temporal so much that we believe only eternal things matter. Some people believe that if you work for things that won’t last into eternity—jobs like roofing and party planning and advertising—you’re wasting your time. This wrong thinking needs to be countered by the truth that God created two sides to reality, the temporal and the eternal. The natural universe God made is very real, just as real as the supernatural universe. Asking which one is real and important is like asking which is real, our nine months in our mother’s womb or life after birth? They are both real; they are both necessary. We have to go through one to get to the other.

Those things we do and make on earth DO have value, given the category they were made for: time. It’s okay for things to have simply temporal value, since God chose for us to live in time before we live in eternity. Our work counts in both time and eternity because God is looking for faithfulness now, and the only way to demonstrate faithfulness is within this physical world. Spiritual needs are important, of course, but first physical needs need to be met. Try sharing the gospel with someone who hasn’t eaten in three days! Some needs are temporal, and those needs must be met. So God equips people with abilities to meet the needs of His creation. In meeting the legitimate physical, temporal needs of people, our work serves people, and people have eternal value because God loves us and made us in His image.

The Sacred/Spiritual Dichotomy; Work as a Platform for Evangelism

Another faulty view of work comes from believing that spiritual, sacred things are far more important than physical, secular things. REAL work, people can think, is serving God in full-time Christian service, and then there’s everything else running a very poor second. This can induce us to think either too highly of
ourselves or too lowly of ourselves. We can think, “Real work is serving God, and then there’s what others do” (which sets us up for condescension), or “Real work is serving God, and then there’s what I have to do” (which sets us up for false guilt and a sense of “missing it”).

It’s an improper way to view life as divided between the sacred and the secular. ALL of life relates to God and is sacred, whether we’re making a business presentation or changing soiled diapers or leading someone to faith in Christ. It’s unwise to think there are sacred things we do and there are secular things we do. It all depends on what’s going on in our hearts. You can engage in what looks like holy activity like prayer and Bible study with a dark, self-centered, unforgiving spirit. Remember the Pharisees? And on the other hand, you can work at a job in a very secular atmosphere where the conversation is littered with profanity, the work is slipshod, the politics are wearisome, and yet like Daniel or Joseph in the Old Testament you can keep your own conversation pure and your behavior above reproach. You can bring honor and glory to God in a very worldly environment. God does not want us to do holy things, He wants us to be holy people.

A final faulty view of work sees it only as a platform for doing evangelism. If every interaction doesn’t lead to an opportunity to share the gospel, one is a failure. Evangelism should be a priority, true, but not our only priority. Life is broader than evangelism. In Ephesians 1, Paul says three times that God made us, not for evangelism, but to live to the praise of His glory. Instead of concentrating only on evangelism, we need to concentrate on living a life that honors God and loves people. That is far more winsome than all the evangelistic strategies in the world. Besides, if work is only a platform for evangelism, it devalues the work itself, and this view of work is too narrow and unfulfilling.

Next we’ll examine at how God wants us to look at work. You might be quite surprised!
How God Wants Us to See Work

So far, we have discussed faulty views of work, but how does God want us to see it? Here’s a startling thought: we actually work for God Himself! Consider Ephesians 6:5-8, which Paul writes to slaves but which we can apply to employees:

> Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

It’s helpful to envision that behind every employer stands the Lord Jesus. He sees everything we do, and He appreciates it and will reward us, regardless of the type of work we do. I learned this lesson one day when I was cleaning the grungy bathtub of a family that wouldn’t notice and would never acknowledge or thank me even if they did. I was getting madder by the minute, throwing myself a pity party, when the Lord broke into my thoughts. He quietly said, “I see you. And I appreciate what you’re doing.” Whoa! In an instant, that totally changed everything. Suddenly, I was able to do a menial job—and later on, more important ones—as a labor of love and worship for Jesus. I know He sees and appreciates what I do. It forever changed my view of work.

God also wants us to see that work is His gift to us. It is not a result of the Fall. God gave Adam and Eve the job of cultivating the garden and exercising dominion over the world before sin entered the world. We were created to work, and for work. Work is God’s good gift to us!

Listen to what Solomon wrote:

> After looking at the way things are on this earth, here’s what I’ve decided is
the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that’s about it. That’s the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what’s given and delighting in the work. It’s God’s gift! 

Being happy in our work doesn’t depend on the work, it depends on our attitude. To make the most of our job and be happy in our work is a gift God wants to give us!

**Why Work is Good**

In this article we’re talking about how to think about work correctly. One question needs to be asked, though: Is all work equally valid? Well, no. All legitimate work is an extension of God’s work of maintaining and providing for His creation. Legitimate work is work that contributes to what God wants done in the world and doesn’t contribute to what He doesn’t want done. So non-legitimate work would include jobs that are illegal, such as prostitution, drug dealing, and professional thieves. Then there are jobs that are legal, but still questionable in terms of ethics and morality, such as working in abortion clinics, pornography, and the gambling industry. These jobs are legal, but you have to ask, how are they cooperating with God to benefit His creation?

Work is God’s gift to us. It is His provision in a number of ways. In *Your Work Matters to God*, the authors suggest five major reasons why work is valuable:

1. Through work we serve people. Most work is part of a huge network of interconnected jobs, industries, goods and services that work together to meet people’s physical needs. Other jobs meet people’s aesthetic and spiritual needs as well.

2. Through work we meet our own needs. Work allows us to exercise the gifts and abilities God gives each person, whether paid or unpaid. God expects adults to
provide for themselves and not mooch off others. Scripture says, “If one will not work, neither let him eat!”{7}

3. Through work we meet our family’s needs. God expects the heads of households to provide for their families. He says, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”{8}

4. Through work we earn money to give to others. In both the Old and New Testaments, God tells us to be generous in meeting the needs of the poor and those who minister to us spiritually. {9}

5. Through work we love God. One of God’s love languages is obedience. When we work, we are obeying His two great commandments to love Him and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.{10} We love God by obeying Him from the heart. We love our neighbor as we serve other people through our work.

We bring glory to God by working industriously, demonstrating what He is like, and serving others by cooperating with God to meet their needs. In serving others, we serve God. And that’s why our work matters to God.

Notes

3. Philippians 1:21
4. Romans 12:1, 2
5. Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14
7. 2 Thess. 3:10
8. 1 Tim. 5:8
9. Leviticus 19:10—Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the
fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. Ephesians 4:28—Let him who steals, steal no longer but rather let him labor performing with his own hands what is good in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. Gal 6:6—The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.


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