

# Mind Games Camp (radio transcript)



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](https://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.<sup>[1]</sup> 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](http://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/](http://probe.org/is-this-the-last-christian-generation/)

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# Transhumanism and Artificial Intelligence

*Kerby Anderson provides an overview of transhumanism and AI, considering its impact on us and our families.*

Over the last few years, we have heard more pundits and futurists talk about transhumanism. What is this philosophy? How will it affect our families and us? How should a Christian think about transhumanism?

Transhumanism is an intellectual and cultural movement that seeks to transform the human condition. The leaders of this movement want to use the developing technologies to eliminate aging and enhance human potential (physical, psychological, and mental).

Nick Bostrom explains that transhumanism views human nature as



a “work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways.” He goes on to explain the transhumanist vision: “Transhumanists hope that by responsible use of science, technology, and other rational means we shall eventually manage to become posthumans, beings with vastly greater capacities than present human beings have.”[\[1\]](#)

Two primary ways they want to do this is through genetic engineering and artificial intelligence. They want to genetically create “the new man,” and they want to use technology to merge humans with machines.

The genetic part of this equation claims that we can use gene splicing and other genetic modification techniques so that genes can be easily transferred between species. But we should be concerned about geneticists who want to create a superhuman race. Leon Kass warned that “Engineering the engineer seems to differ in kind from engineering the engine.”[\[2\]](#)

The other part of the equation concerns technology. The leaders of transhumanism believe we are on the cusp of a technological threshold in both artificial intelligence and human-machine technology.

The “humanism” in transhumanism reminds us that this is a philosophy rooted in Enlightenment humanism. But it is different. Whereas the goal of humanism was to develop the ideal human, the goal of transhumanism is to transcend what we have traditionally considered human.

The Transhumanist Declaration provides eight key points to describe what the signers believe should be the future of humans.[\[3\]](#) It begins with this claim: “Humanity stands to be profoundly affected by science and technology in the future. We envision the possibility of broadening human potential by overcoming aging, cognitive shortcomings, involuntary suffering, and our confinement to planet Earth.”

## Two Principles of Transhumanism

Now I would like to look at the two foundational principles of transhumanism.

The first principle is “metaman.” Futurists predict that our current human condition will evolve into being a cyborg (short for *cybernetic organism*). Our bodies will be joined to machines as we “evolve” through technological progress.

Transhumanists believe we will have immense knowledge and information because of the rapid advances in artificial intelligence and computing power. These advances will eventually exceed human intelligence. Meanwhile, advances in genetic engineering will allow scientists to modify the human body to keep pace with these technological advances.

This is the two-fold hope of the transhumanists: artificial intelligence and genetic engineering. One represents biological change through mixing and matching genes. The other presents the merging of human intelligence with artificial intelligence.

In fact, the hope is to create a superorganism through the transference of genes between species. This may even eradicate the differences between species. One scientist even suggested that tampering with the genetic codes of all plants and animals on this planet would cause the “definition of human beings to drift.”[\[4\]](#) Humans would merge with the rest of nature, thereby creating a planetary superorganism he calls “Metaman.”

In essence, transhumanists would like to erase any distinction between human, other forms in nature, and machines. Humans would now control the future direction of evolution and merge all forms of life and non-life together in one enormous superorganism.

The second principle is “the singularity.” Transhumanists wait

for the arrival of a technological threshold that will be achieved through artificial intelligence. Futurists predict that sometime in the middle of this century, we will achieve what transhumanists call “the singularity.”[\[5\]](#) The current distinction between humanity and nature and machine will fade and there will no longer be any barriers between the natural world and artificial world.

This utopian view assumes that humans will be able to transcend the limitations of our biological bodies and brains. There will no longer be any distinction between humans and machines. And this, say the transhumanists, will allow humanity to no longer be resigned to death as the end. All of this, they predict, will usher in a technological millennium.

## **History of Artificial Intelligence**

The term artificial intelligence was coined in 1956 by the American computer scientist John McCarthy. He defines it as “getting a computer to do things which, when done by people, are said to involve intelligence.” Unfortunately, there is no standard definition of what constitutes AI. Part of the problem is the lack of agreement on what constitutes intelligence and how it relates to machines.

McCarthy proposes that “Intelligence is the computational part of the ability to achieve goals in the world. Varying kinds and degrees of intelligence occur in people, many animals, and some machines.”[\[6\]](#) This would include such capabilities as logic, reasoning, conceptualization, self-awareness, learning, emotional knowledge, planning, creativity, abstract thinking, and problem solving.

Researchers have for decades hoped to build machines that could do anything the human brain could do. Progress was slow for many decades but has accelerated in the last few years. A significant breakthrough occurred in 2012, when an idea called the neural network shifted the entire field. This is a

mathematical system that learns skills by finding statistical patterns in enormous amounts of data.

The next big step came around 2018 with large language models. Companies such as Google, Microsoft, and OpenAI began building neural networks trained on vast amounts of text including digital books, academic papers, and Wikipedia articles. Surprisingly, these systems learned to write unique prose and computer code and to carry on sophisticated conversations. This breakthrough has been called “generative AI.”

These AI algorithms are based on intricate webs of neural networks and allow for what is considered “deep learning.” These advanced AI systems collect huge amounts of data and can correct mistakes and even anticipate future problems.

The benefits are significant. Factory automation, self-driving cars, efficient use of resources, correlating massive amounts of data, and fewer errors in medical diagnoses are just a few of the many ways in which AI will improve our lives in the 21st century.

Unfortunately, AI poses dangers to us.

## **Dangers of Artificial Intelligence**

Although artificial intelligence offers some significant benefits, it also poses many dangers. The authors of the open letter on AI warn that human beings are not ready for a powerful AI under present conditions or even in the foreseeable future. What happens after AI becomes smarter than humans? That is a question that bothered Eliezer Yudkowsky. In his opinion piece for *Time* magazine, he argued that “We Need to Shut It All Down.”[\[7\]](#)

He warned that “Many researchers steeped in these issues, including myself, expect that the most likely result of building a superhumanly smart AI, under anything remotely like the current circumstances, is that literally everyone on Earth

will die.” He doesn’t think this is merely a possibility but believes it is a virtual certainty.

He uses this illustration to drive home his point: “To visualize a hostile superhuman AI, don’t imagine a lifeless book-smart thinker dwelling inside the internet and sending ill-intentioned emails. Visualize an entire alien civilization, thinking at millions of times human speeds, initially confined to computers—in a world of creatures that are, from its perspective, very stupid and very slow.”

Bill Gates understands both the benefits and dangers of AI. He explains that the “development of AI is as fundamental as the creation of the microprocessor, the personal computer, the Internet, and the mobile phone.” While these changes in how we work, learn, and communicate are good, there is also “the possibility that AIs will run out of control.”[\[8\]](#)

He asks, “Could a machine decide that humans are a threat, conclude that its interests are different from ours, or simply stop caring about us?” He recognizes that “superintelligent AIs are in our future” and that they “will be able to do everything that a human brain can, but without any practical limits on the size of its memory or the speed at which it operates.” However, these “strong AIs” will “probably be able to establish their own goals.” Those would likely conflict with our best interests.

Notice the number of dystopian movies where the machines have taken over. That would include movies like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *I, Robot*, the *Matrix* series, and the *Terminator* series. That is why many people fear how AI will be used in the future.

## **Biblical Perspective**

How should Christians respond to transhumanism? We should begin by looking at the philosophical foundation of this

movement. It begins with a belief that there is no God and we are responsible for our own destiny. It also is based upon an evolutionary foundation that assumes that we are the product of millions of years of chance process.

The leaders of transhumanism see genetic engineering as a tool to be used to speed up the process of evolution. We can use genetics to enhance and improve the human race. If we believe that humans are merely the product of the undirected force of evolution, then certainly intelligent scientists can “improve on nature.”

The evolutionary argument goes like this. Humans die due to some technological glitch (e.g., heart stops beating). Therefore, “Every technical problem has a technical solution. We don’t need to wait for the Second Coming in which to overcome death. A couple of geeks in a lab can do it. If traditionally death was the specialty of priests and theologians, now the engineers are taking over.”[\[9\]](#)

The leaders of transhumanism believe we should use technology to improve the human race so that we are perfect and immortal. In many ways, this technological imperative harkens back to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Instead, we should use technology wisely as we exercise dominion over the world (Genesis 1:28).

Here are a few biblical principles. First, we begin with the reality that each human being is created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 139:13-16, Isaiah 43:6-7, Jeremiah 1:5, Ephesians 4:24). We have been given dominion and stewardship over the creation (Genesis 1:28, Colossians 1:16) and should reject any form of technology that would usurp or subvert that stewardship responsibility.

Second, humans are created as moral agents. Computer technology can aid us in making moral decisions because of its powerful ability to process data. But we can never cede our

moral responsibility to those same computers. God will hold us responsible for the moral or immoral decisions we make (Roman 2:6-8, Galatians 5:19-21, 2 Peter 1:5-8). We should never give computers that authority.

We should reject the vision of transhumanism that looks forward to the day in which man and machine become one in the singularity. We must reject the idea that this is the next step in human evolution. We should reject the worship of technology and reject the idea that AI will make us more human. And we should reject the false utopian vision of a world when machines are given co-equal value to humans created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

### Notes

1. Nick Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values," *Ethical Issues for the Twenty-First Century* (2005): 3-14.
2. Kass, Leon. "The New Biology: What Price Relieving Man's Estate?" *Science*, 19 November 1971, 779.
3. Transhumanism Declaration, [www.humanityplus.org/the-transhumanist-declaration](http://www.humanityplus.org/the-transhumanist-declaration).
4. Gregory Stock, *Metaman: The Merging of Humans and Machines Into a Global Superorganism*, NY: Simon and Schuster, 165.
5. Ray Kurtzweil, *The Singularity Is Near*, NY: Penguin, 2005.
6. John McCarthy, "What is AI/Basic Questions," [jmc.stanford.edu/artificial-intelligence/what-is-ai/index.html](http://jmc.stanford.edu/artificial-intelligence/what-is-ai/index.html)
7. Eliezer Yudkowsky, "Pausing AI Developments Isn't Enough. We Need to Shut it All Down," *Time*, March 29, 2023.
8. Bill Gates, "The Age of AI has Begun," March 21, 2023, [www.gatesnotes.com/The-Age-of-AI-Has-Begun](http://www.gatesnotes.com/The-Age-of-AI-Has-Begun).
9. Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, London: Penguin, 2016, 23.

### For Further Reading

Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005, chapter 20.

Kerby Anderson, *Technology and Social Trends* Cambridge, OH:



Christian Publishers, 2016, chapter 3.

Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2019.

Lawrence Terlizze, *Into the Void: The Coming Transhuman Transformation*, Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishers, 2016.

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# The Eclipse Declares the Glory of God, v. 2024

*Sue Bohlin is very excited to be the path of the upcoming total solar eclipse, where God shows off once again.*

“The heavens declare the glory of God,” Psalm 19 tells us. On April 8, 2024, millions of Americans will have an incredible opportunity to see His heavenly glory in a way most of us never have: through a total solar eclipse. On a path running from Texas to South Maine, observers on the ground will see the moon slip in front of the sun, blocking out all its light and dropping the temperature drastically (about 10 to 15 degrees Fahrenheit) and suddenly.

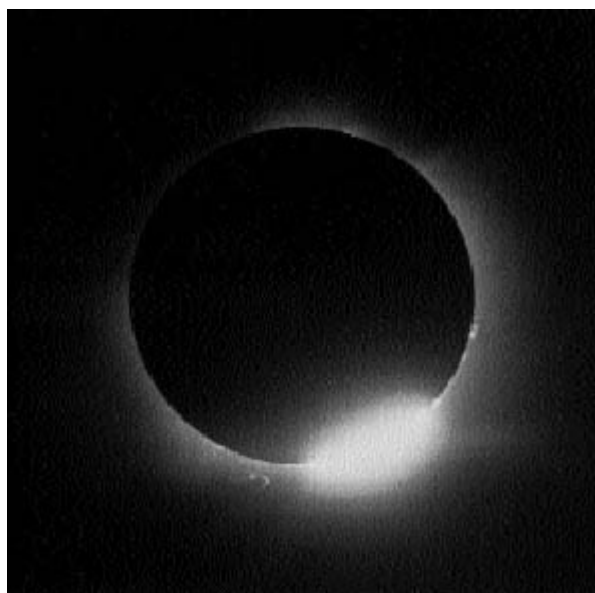
I am thrilled beyond words that by the grace of God, our home in Dallas, Texas is in the path of totality. All I have to do is go out in our back yard to experience this once-in-a-lifetime event! :::doing the happy dance:::

The glory of God isn't just seen, it's *felt* as well. Eclipse-chasers, and even those who have only experienced one total eclipse, report that at the moment of totality (when the moon completely covers the sun, plunging the land into an eerie darkness), people break out with yells and shouts and

applause. Many report the hair on the back of their necks standing up. And both locals and visiting astronomers are equally in awe—and often in tears. Like one's first in-person look at the Grand Canyon, it is deeply emotional to be thrilled by something much, much bigger than oneself.

Illustra Media's wonderful DVD *The Privileged Planet*, based on the book by the same name by Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards [\[1\]](#), exposed me to the magnificence of a total solar eclipse. I will never forget the goosebumps at learning that the sun is 400 times farther away than our moon, but it's also 400 times larger. This means that both of these heavenly bodies appear to be the same size to us on Earth. This phenomenal "coincidence" also makes a total eclipse possible.

During an eclipse, **the heavens declare the glory of God** by allowing us to see things about the sun we wouldn't be able to observe any other way, beautiful and gloriously resplendent. Just before totality we can see "Baily's Beads." Only seen during an eclipse, bright "beads" appear at the edge of the moon where the sun is shining through lunar valleys, a feature of the moon's rugged landscape. This is followed by the "diamond ring" effect, where the brightness of the sun radiates as a thin band around the circumference of the moon, and the last moments of the sun's visibility explode like a diamond made of pure light. After the minutes of totality, the diamond ring effect appears again on the opposite side of the moon as the first rays of the sun flare brilliantly. These sky-jewelry phenomena are so outside of mankind's control that witnessing them stirs our spirits (even on YouTube!) with the truth of Romans 1:20—"God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and



divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”



A total solar eclipse offers so much more, though, than Baily's Beads and the Diamond Ring. At the moment of totality, the pinkish arc of the sun's chromosphere (the part of the sun's atmosphere just above the surface) suddenly “turns on” as if an unseen hand flips a switch. I knew God is very fond of pink because of how He paints glorious sunrises and sunsets in Earth's skies, but those fortunate enough to see a total eclipse can see how He radiates pinkness from the sun itself! ***The heavens declare the glory of God!***

But wait! That's not all! Along with the flare of the sun's pink chromosphere, a rainbow-like band called the “flash spectrum” appears when the sun is viewed through a prism! (You can google this to see pictures. The best ones are copyrighted so I can't show them to you here.) ***The heavens declare the colorful glory of God!***

For the few minutes of totality, the naked eye can see the sun's lovely corona (Latin for crown) streaming out from the sun. We can't see the corona except during an eclipse because looking straight at the sun for even a few seconds causes eye damage, and because the sun's ball



of fire overwhelms the (visually) fragile corona. This is another way that an eclipse allows us to see how **the heavens**

## declare the glory of God.

Astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez noticed details about eclipses that got him excited:

- During a total solar eclipse, the moon is just large enough to block the large photosphere (the big ball of fiery gas), but not so large that it obscures the colorful chromosphere.
- The moon and the sun are two of the roundest measured bodies in the solar system. (Some moons are potato-shaped!) So when the round disk of the moon passes in front of the equally round disk of the sun, the shapes match perfectly.
- He studied all 65 of the moons in our solar system and discovered that ours are the best planet and best moon for studying the sun during an eclipse. Because the moon fits so perfectly over the sun, its blinding light is shielded, providing astronomers with a view of the sun's atmosphere. We can discern finer details in its chromosphere and corona than from any other planet.
- Being able to study the flash spectrum during a total eclipse enables astro-scientists to determine the chemical makeup of other, distant stars without leaving Earth.

These facts of *the heavens declare the glory of God!*

Michael Bakich wrote of the 2017 eclipse in *Astronomy Magazine* blog,

This eclipse will be the most-viewed ever. I base this proclamation on four factors: 1) the attention it will get from the media; 2) the superb coverage of the highway system in our country; 3) the typical weather on that date; and 4) the vast number of people who will have access to it from nearby large cities.[{2}](#)

I think this is true of the 2024 eclipse as well. Whether you

are fortunate enough to be in the path of the total eclipse like me, or will only get to see 75% of the sun's surface covered by the moon (with eclipse glasses, of course!), this extremely important sky event will be proclaiming to everyone that ***the heavens declare the glory of God***. May it make a lasting impression on us all that teaches us more about God's glory!

1. Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2004)

2.

<http://cs.astronomy.com/asy/b/astronomy/archive/2014/08/05/25-facts-you-should-know-about-the-august-21-2017-total-solar-eclipse.aspx>

This post originally appeared at  
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on Feb. 20, 2024.

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## The Glory of Grace

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

I bet you recognize "grace" as a theology word. Many of us are quick to say, "Oh yeah, I know what that is. We're saved by grace through faith." Or we know of churches with the word "grace" in their name. But many of us don't have a real handle on it. Often that's because we haven't seen it modeled in our families, our churches, or our communities. We're too focused on trying to prove ourselves good enough, too busy trying to keep God from getting mad at us.

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



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

Pastor Mark Driscoll has an especially great definition of grace. Instead of the one we've heard for years, "God's undeserved favor," Mark calls it "ill-deserved" favor.[{3}](#) But my all-time favorite definition comes from John Ortberg: "Grace is the offer of God's ceaseless presence and irrational love that cannot be stopped. It's the flow of God's power and presence and favor in your life from one moment to the next that enables you to do whatever it is God has for you to do."[{4}](#) I want to focus on God's power, presence, and favor, as well as giving some real-life examples of what grace looks like.

# Power

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

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

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

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

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

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

I like to think of the power of God's grace as electricity that is available twenty-four hours, seven days a week. God's grace is always available to us at every moment of our life, and because of His goodness and faithfulness, we never have to fear a power shortage of God's grace.

The key to experiencing the flow of God's power is what Jesus called *abiding*, choosing to remain in a state of trustful dependence on God. Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine,



you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for *apart from Me you can do nothing.*"

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

## Presence

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

My favorite illustration of grace as God's presence is the building of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Dwight Edwards relates that during its initial stages of construction, "Twenty-three workers fell to their deaths. Finally, halfway through the project, a large net was put in place beneath the bridge. From then on, only ten men actually fell—all caught by the net. Plus, the workers' productivity was raised by twenty-five percent. Assured that their safety was no longer in question, they pursued their work with far greater freedom and effectiveness than before. This is exactly

what God has done for us. Stretched wide beneath us, extending from eternity past to eternity future, is God's perfect grace, assuring every believer that we can never fall from His favor. No matter how badly we falter or fail, we can never plunge past the grace of God."[\[5\]](#)

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

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

## Favor

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

Five-year-old Matt got up from his nap one day and said, "Guess what, mommy, I just had a dream about Jesus!" The mommy asked, "Well, what did Jesus say to you?" "Nothing." "Well, what was Jesus doing?" "Nothing." "Now Matthew, you just said you had a dream about Jesus, he **MUST** have said or done *something*!" Matt was quiet for a moment, and then with a wiggle and grin he looked up and said shyly, "He just stood there and *liked* me."

When somebody likes you, their eyes light up when they see

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

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

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

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

Oh yeah. That's the beauty of grace.

## What Grace Looks Like

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

grace with others.

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

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

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

When my friend's mother contracted Alzheimer's, she told her daughter early in the progression of the disease, "If I get to the point where I don't recognize you, don't take it personally." She was expressing grace in being more concerned about her daughter's hurt than her own loss of memory.

Another friend needed eye surgery to keep her from losing her

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

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

## Notes

1. See, for example, John 15:5; 19:30; Colossians 3:4; Ephesians 2:8-9.
2. Ephesians 1:4-5
3. [marshill.com/media/religionsaves/grace](http://marshill.com/media/religionsaves/grace)
4. This quote came from a sermon preached at Pastor Ortberg’s church, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California, 2003. When I emailed him asking for a specific citation, his answer was, “I have no idea, Sue.”
5. Dwight Edwards, *Experiencing Christ Within Workbook: Passionately Embracing God’s Provisions for Supernatural Living* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2002), p. 105.
6. Numbers 6:25
7. Matthew 3:17
8. [jeffdlawrence.com/2011/12/23/some-thoughts-on-how-to-talk-to-little-girls/](http://jeffdlawrence.com/2011/12/23/some-thoughts-on-how-to-talk-to-little-girls/)

# Probe's 50th Anniversary Celebration Banquet

☒ On Nov. 4, 2023, we commemorated Probe's 50th Anniversary with a celebration banquet at Dallas' Renaissance Hotel. We are so very grateful for God's goodness and supernatural enabling to serve Him this half-century by sharing biblical worldview and apologetics worldwide!



200 friends gathered in the Malachite Showroom to help us celebrate God's goodness over 50 years of ministry.





Probe President Kerby Anderson read an official proclamation honoring Probe from Texas Governor Greg Abbott.



We were blessed to share video and written endorsements, like this one from former Moody Bible Institute President Erwin Lutzer, who also wrote a book for us.





Dr. Ray Bohlin, a 48-year veteran of Probe and former president of the ministry, presented an overview of what we've been able to do in our 50 years. See a short list below.



The three children of Probe's co-founder, Jimmy Williams-Trey, Todd and Leslie—shared powerful memories of their amazing parents and growing up along with Probe.



Dr. Jim Thames, representing Dallas Theological Seminary, surprised Kerby with a Lifetime Achievement Award from DTS as our chairman of the board, Parker Eng, documented the award.



We were especially honored to be joined by our beloved June Hunt and her friend Kathy. When June founded the Hope Center, the beautiful retreat lodge-like office building housing scores of Christian ministries, she invited Probe to be one of the first to office there.

**Some of what Dr. Ray Bohlin shared of the past 50 years:**

- Through our Christian Update Forums, we brought biblical worldview to college classrooms as guest lecturers on more than 50 campuses. At least through 1980, we spoke in over 1,600 classrooms, to 70,000 students, with 70% positive to only 7% negative comments. Then we got canceled by administrations who didn't want their students exposed to truth.
- So we launched a radio outreach. Our weekly radio program, still airing after 40 years, has had tens of millions of listeners. They are available as [12-minute podcasts](#) on Probe.org. We launched a second conversational podcast, [Head & Heart](#), in 2020.
- Our website continues to have a literal worldwide impact, being visited by 193 (out of 195) countries in the past year. We offer over 2000 [articles](#) and [answers to email](#). (You might say we were the original "Got Questions.org"?)
- Our staff has taught on every continent except Antarctica (the penguins aren't interested).
- We've taught 180 [Mind Games](#) conferences, both weekend and week-long camps.
- As the world gets darker and the church becomes more like the world than the Word, the need for what Probe offers is greater than ever.

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## **Bible Literacy Quiz: A Test of Scripture Knowledge**

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

*feel for your breadth and depth of Scriptural knowledge.*

This article is also available in [Spanish](#).



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

Evangelical pollster George Barna says,

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

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

Take the quiz yourself: click [here](#) for a format with the questions and answers separated.

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



Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

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

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

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

Esther and Ruth.

#### **4. What are the Ten Commandments?**

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

#### **5. What is the Greatest Commandment?**

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

#### **6. What is the second Greatest Commandment?**

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

#### **7. What is the Golden Rule?**

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

#### **8. What is the Great Commission?**

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the

very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19,20)

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

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

**10. To whom did God give the 10 Commandments?**

Moses. (Exodus 20)

**11. Which two people did not die?**

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

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

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

**13. What is the beginning of wisdom?**

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

**14. Who delivered the Sermon on the Mount?**

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 5-7)

**15. How did sickness and death enter the world?**

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

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

Pontius Pilate. (Matthew 27:26)

**17. Who are the major prophets?**

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

**18. What people group is the Old Testament about?**

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

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

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

**20. How many people were on Noah's ark?**

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

**21. Who was the first murderer?**

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

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

Job. (See book of Job)

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

David. (1 Chronicles 29:28)

**24. Who was "the weeping prophet?"**

Jeremiah.

**25. Who was thrown into the lion's den?**

Daniel. (Daniel 6)



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

David and Goliath. (1 Samuel 17)

**27. What is the book of Acts about?**

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

**28. What are epistles?**

Letters.

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

Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4)

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

Abraham. (Genesis 22:2)

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

Passover. (Exodus 12:27)

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

Joseph. (Genesis 41:41)

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

Esther. (Esther 2:17)

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

Ruth. (Ruth 4:17)

**35. Which angel appeared to Mary?**

Gabriel. (Luke 1:26)

**36. How did the Lord Jesus die?**

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

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

He was raised from the dead. (John 20)

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

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

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

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

**40. How did the universe and world get here?**

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

**41. Where did Satan and the demons come from?**

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

**42. Who directed the writing of the Bible?**

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

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

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

**44. Who taught in parables?**

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 13:3)

**45. What are parables?**

A short, simple story with a spiritual point.

**46. Which two animals talked with human speech?**

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

**47. With which woman did David commit adultery?**

Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 11)

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

Solomon. (2 Samuel 12:24)

**49. Who was the female judge of Israel?**

Deborah. (Judges 4:4)

**50. Who was the wisest man in the world?**

Solomon. (1 Kings 3:12)

**51. Who was the first man?**

Adam. (Genesis 2:20)

**52. Who was the most humble man on earth?**

Moses. (Numbers 12:3)

**53. Who was the strongest man on earth?**

Samson. (Judges 13-16)

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

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

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

Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 2:5)

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

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

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

Jonah. (Jonah 1:17)

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

Malachi.

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

Joshua. (Joshua 10)

**60. Who was the first king of Israel?**

Saul. (1 Samuel 13:1)

**61. Who built the temple in Israel?**

Solomon. (1 Kings 6)

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

Levites. (Deuteronomy 10:8)

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

Jericho. (Joshua 6:20)

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

Manna and quail. (Exodus 16)

**65. Which two people walked on water?**

Jesus and Peter. (Matthew 14:29)

**66. Who was the first martyr?**

Stephen. (Acts 7)

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

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

**68. What is the Lord's Prayer?**

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

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

Mary Magdalene. (John 20:16)

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

John the Baptist. (John 14:10)

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

Egypt. (Matthew 2:13-15)

**72. What was Christ's first miracle?**

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

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

Lazarus. (John 11)

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

Paul. (see book of Acts)

**75. Who was Paul's first partner?**

Barnabas. (Acts 13:2)

**76. Whom did an angel release from prison?**

Peter. (Acts 12)

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

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

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

Isaiah 53.

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

Jacob. (Genesis 32:22-32)

**80. Which two pastors did Paul write letters to?**

Timothy and Titus.

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

Paul. (Acts 28:5-6)

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

James and Jude. (Matthew 13:55)

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

Luke and Acts. (2 Timothy 4:11)

**84. Who had a coat of many colors?**

Joseph. (Genesis 37:3)

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

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

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

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

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

John the Baptist was a prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of God was near in preparation for his cousin Jesus' ministry. The John who wrote the gospel of John, the epistles—1, 2 and 3 John—and Revelation, was one of the twelve apostles and one of those closest to the Lord, along with Peter and James. He called himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

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

Moses. (Exodus 3)

**89. How many sons did Jacob have?**

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

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



Esau. (Genesis 25:33)

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

Psalm 23.

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

Peter. (Matthew 26:69-75)

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

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

**94. Where is the New Testament "Hall of Faith?"**

Hebrews 11.

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

Elijah and Moses. (Mark 9:4)

**96. Who is the second Adam?**

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

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

Hosea. (Hosea 1:2)

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

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

**99. What are supernatural enablings that allow a believer to**

**serve the Body of Christ with ease and effectiveness?**

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

**100. Whose tomb was Christ buried in?**

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

**101. Who wrote the book of Hebrews?**

Nobody knows.

**102. Which is the “epistle of joy?”**

Philippians.

**103. What is the book of Revelation about?**

The end of the world.

**104. Who is the bride of Christ?**

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

**Note**

1. [bit.ly/fr8BuA](http://bit.ly/fr8BuA)

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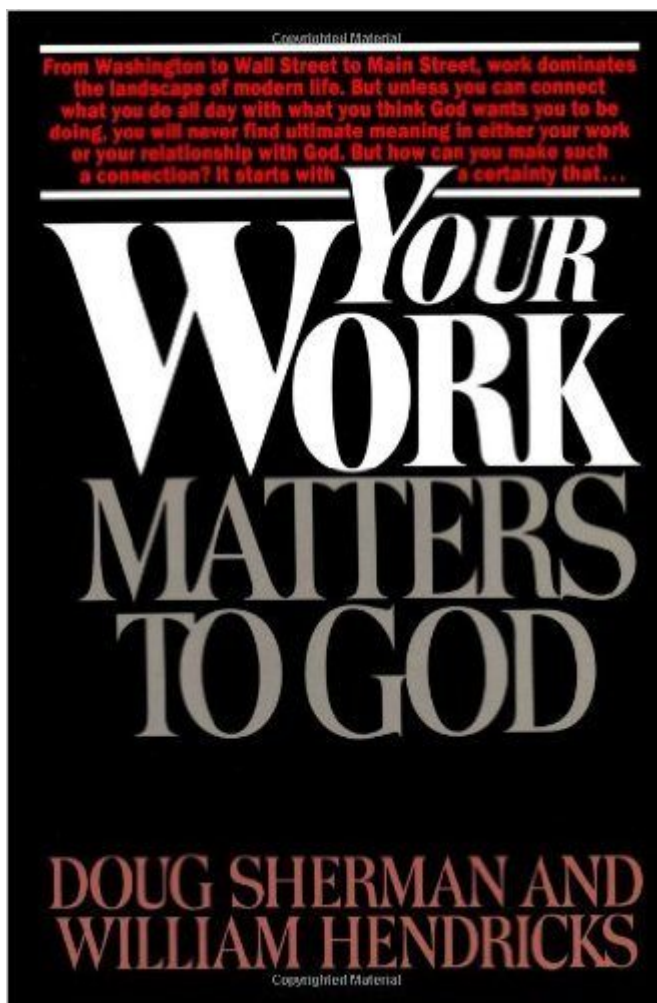
## **Your Work Matters to God**

*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.*



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

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*,<sup>{1}</sup>



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.”<sup>{2}</sup>

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.[{5}](#) 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![\[6\]](#)

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

1. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987.
2. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. p. 67.
3. Philippians 1:21
4. Romans 12:1, 2
5. Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14
6. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19, The Message.
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.
10. Matthew 22:37-39

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## “Do Babies Go to Heaven?”

**Do babies and small children go to heaven?**

We have lengthy answers to this question [here](#) and [here](#), but [Shane Pruitt](#) provided an especially insightful, excellent answer to this question on [X \(Twitter\)](#):

At 12:50 AM on a Tuesday morning, our ten-year-old son with unique needs went to be Jesus.

So, a statement like this begs the question, "Am I just wishing this to be true, or do I Biblically know this to be true?"

Meaning, is there support in Scripture that God welcomes babies (born and unborn), young children, and those with unique mental needs (meaning they may be older, but have the mind of a child) immediately into Heaven?

I absolutely believe the Bible answers this. Here are Biblical reasons why I know this to be true:

*God's Knowledge:* The Lord knows every child at conception and values them. They are considered a person, known and loved by God, from the very beginning. (Psalm 139:13 – 16).

*God's Declaration:* God refers to young children as "innocents". Not that they were perfect or without a sin nature, but they were innocent of the ability to understand the need of repentance and forgiveness. (Jeremiah 19:4).

*God's Promise:* In Deuteronomy, we find an unbelieving generation of Israelites being prevented from entering the Promised Land, but their children were exempt from that penalty and were able to enter (Deuteronomy 1:39).

*God's Possession:* He considers all babies to be His. God condemns Israel in Ezekiel 16:21, of the wretched act of child sacrifice. "You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire."

*God's Compassion:* He has compassion on all little ones and infants, and is not willing that even one of them should perish (Matthew 18:14). His grace covers them, until they realize their need of a Savior.

*God's Illustration:* He used a child to illustrate what one must become like to enter His Kingdom (Matthew 18:1 -5). If infants and children would end up in Hell if they died young,

He most likely wouldn't use them as an illustration of how to enter the Kingdom.

*God's Compliment:* He said children were the greatest in His Kingdom (Matthew 18:4).

*God's Blessing:* Jesus blessed the little children and said the Kingdom of God belongs to them (Mark 9:13 – 16). Jesus typically didn't bless those destined to Hell or promise them the Kingdom, unless He meant it.

*David's Assurance:* David knew that he would be in heaven forever after death (Ps 23:6). He also had the assurance that his baby (that had died) would be there as well, where they would be reunited. "... I will go to him, but he will not return to me (2 Samuel 12:22 – 23)."

*God's Presence:* I do not believe in a "soul sleep". When babies, young children, and those with unique needs die; they are with the Lord immediately (2 Corinthians 5:8, Luke 23:43).

God is not silent on this topic. Scripture speaks.

Therefore, you can know with absolute confidence that you did not "lose" your baby, child, or loved one with unique needs. You didn't lose them, because you know exactly where they are. They are perfectly and fully alive with Jesus.

Posted 8/3/2023

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## Sticks and Stones . . .

I'm not sure when it began, but the last several years we have seen an explosion of name-calling. Social media is probably the main culprit in giving people freedom to chunk labels and

names like snowballs at people they don't even know, with no concern of consequences.

It's no longer a matter of normal human interactions to disagree with someone; now it's about demonizing them. And dragging them through the mud. And judging their character and reputation.

- Refuse to subscribe to progressive ideologies? You are hateful.
- Dare to criticize someone's position? You're a bigot.
- Talk about God's plan for marriage as only between one man and one woman? You're homophobic.
- Stand up for common sense in insisting that boys can't become girls and girls can't become boys? You're transphobic.

This kind of name-calling has become personal. The Southern Poverty Law Center, having discovered a cash cow in declaring organizations hate groups, declared Probe Ministries a hate group because we (mainly me) agree with God's design for sexuality and gender. In agreeing with scripture that homosexual behavior violates God's command and is thus sin, we are called hateful. For years, I have vetted my articles on LGBT by sharing them with friends who no longer identify as gay or lesbian, to make sure they are not only accurate but also kind and compassionate.

But when our neighbor learned that Probe was on the SPLC's hate group list, he told my husband that I was hateful.

"Sue? Hateful? C'mon, you've known her for years. Do you honestly think she's hateful?"

I'm grateful that he gave it some thought, and the next week he retracted his assessment. That was nice; his name-calling wasn't hurtful to me. Kinda crazy, but not hurtful-because I knew it wasn't true. He was just being consistent to his leftist beliefs.

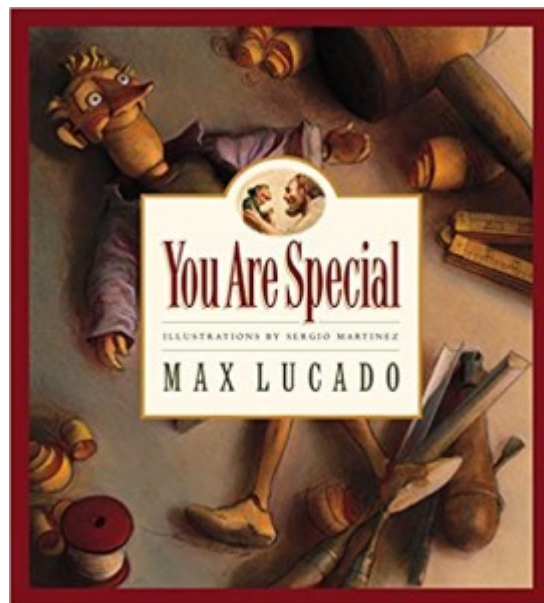
In addition to being called hateful, I've received a number of ugly emails declaring me ignorant, foolish, biased, an idiot, and some disgusting sexual slurs as well. In each case, the writers felt free to unleash their hostility and judgmentalism on me, a total stranger.

We've all heard the old rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me," right? Of course, it's a lie. Name-calling DOES hurt, especially from people close to us, who should be protecting our hearts rather than trying to inflict pain.

But it doesn't necessarily have to.

I was thinking about why these names slide off me the way hair slides off a plastic cape during a haircut.

The best explanation, I think, is found in my favorite children's book, Max Lucado's *You Are Special*.



It's about a group of wooden people called the Wemmicks who all day, every day, go around giving each other gold star stickers or gray dot stickers. Punchinello, who can't seem to get anything right, only gets gray dot stickers.

But one day he meets a girl who doesn't have any gold star OR gray dots. It's not that people don't try to give her stickers-they just don't stick.



Punchinello asks her why, and she says, "It's easy. Every day I go to see Eli the woodcarver. I go and sit in the workshop with him."

Punchinello goes to see Eli.

*"Hmm," the maker spoke thoughtfully as he inspected the gray circles. "Looks like you've been given some bad marks."*

*"I didn't mean to, Eli. I really tried hard."*

*"Oh, you don't have to defend yourself to me, child. I don't care what the other Wemmicks think."*

*"You don't?"*

*"No, and you shouldn't either. Who are they to give stars or dots? They're Wemmicks just like you. What they think doesn't matter, Punchinello. All that matters is what I think. And I think you are pretty special."*

*Punchinello laughed. "Me, special? Why? I can't walk fast. I can't jump. My paint is peeling. Why do I matter to you?"*

*Eli looked at Punchinello, put his hands on those small wooden shoulders, and spoke very slowly. "Because you're mine. That's why you matter to me."*

Eli explains to Punchinello why the stickers don't stick on his friend:

*"Because she has decided that what I think is more important than what they think. The stickers only stick if you let them. . . The stickers only stick if they matter to you. The more you trust my love, the less you care about the stickers."*

As Punchinello walks out the door, Eli reminds him, "You're

special because I made you. And I don't make mistakes."

Punchinello thinks, "I think he really means it."

And then a dot fell to the ground.

For 50 years I have been spending daily time with my Maker, listening to what He says is true about me: I am His beloved child in whom He is well pleased. I am His redeemed daughter, a princess warrior, His workmanship, gifted with supernatural enablings to fulfill the works He gave me to do. My heavenly Father loves me the same way He loves His Son; His Son loves me so much He died for me and rose from the dead to make me His bride.

Being loved and cherished like that, no wonder the stickers of labels and names slide right off me.

If you struggle with what other people think of you, immerse yourself in what your Maker says is true about you. My favorite list, "I Am a Child of the King" by Dr. Ed Laymance, can be found [here](#).

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/sticks-and-stones/](https://blogs.bible.org/sticks-and-stones/) on July 23, 2023.

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# The Value of Suffering: A Christian Perspective

*Sue Bohlin looks at suffering from a Christian perspective. Applying a biblical worldview to this difficult subject results in a distinctly different approach to suffering than*

*our natural inclination of blame and self pity.*

*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*



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

## **Suffering Prepares Us to Be the Bride of Christ**

Among the many reasons God allows us to suffer, this is my personal favorite: it prepares us to be the radiant bride of Christ. The Lord Jesus has a big job to do, changing His ragamuffin church into a glorious bride worthy of the Lamb. Ephesians



5:26-27 tells us He is making us holy by washing us with the Word—presenting us to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. Suffering develops holiness in unholy people. But *getting there* is painful in the Lord's "laundry room." When you use bleach to get rid of stains, it's a harsh process. Getting rid of wrinkles is even more painful: ironing means a combination of heat plus pressure. Ouch! No wonder suffering hurts!

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

It's also important for all wives, but most especially the future wife of the Son of God, to have a submissive heart.

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

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

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

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

## **Suffering Allows Us to Minister Comfort to Others Who Suffer**

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

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

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

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

There's another aspect of bringing comfort to those in pain. Those who have suffered tend not to judge others experiencing

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

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

## **Suffering Develops Humble Dependence on God**

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

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

Sometimes we hurt so much we can't pray. We are forced to depend on the intercession of the Holy Spirit and the saints,

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

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

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

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

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

permission, and therefore all is well. He will make it work together with all life's experiences for good."

## **Suffering Displays God's Strength Through Our Weakness**

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

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

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



trials. I got facts in Sunday School, but I learned faith through trusting God in difficult circumstances. I got truth from studying, but I got to know the Savior through suffering.”

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

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

## **Suffering Gets Us Ready for Heaven**

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

Suffering teaches us the difference between the important and the transient. It prepares us for heaven by teaching us how

unfulfilling life on earth is and helping us develop an eternal perspective. Suffering makes us homesick for heaven.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Notes

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