

A Holy Limp

I got polio at eight months old. Every step of my life, I have walked with a limp. It was a source of great shame to me growing up because of people's stares. And my limp was probably the biggest reason I hated polio and hated how I saw myself, as the "ugly crippled girl."

One day, as I studied the scriptures, God gave me a divine "lightbulb moment." As I read in Genesis 32 about Jacob wrestling all night with God, the same Lord who touched his hip, asked me, "Do you see the souvenir I gave Jacob from his night with Me?" Jacob walked the rest of his life with a limp. He had been touched by God and it changed the way he walked.

It was a holy limp.

In that moment, I saw that there was nothing inherently shameful about a limp if God gave one to His beloved Jacob.

Certainly, this doesn't magically transform a limp into something beautiful and good—after all, it means something is wrong. But God can, and does, bring something beautiful and good out of the limps of our lives.

Over the past few years of walking with hurting people, I have come to see how God uses my limp to connect with those whose hearts are still scarred and limited by the wounds they've received. As I wrote to a dear friend who left behind decades of life as a gay activist when she trusted Christ, and who still has to submit her feelings to Jesus every day of her life:

"You know, it's entirely possible your attractions to women won't change and you will walk with an emotional limp the rest of your life. . . just as I will continue to walk with a physical limp the rest of my earthly life. But both of us can glorify God in our limping by honoring Him with our choices,

as we look to Him to restore us to a perfect future that includes running and jumping and leaping and loving perfectly, on the other side.

"I know that may sound weird, 'glorifying God in our limping,' but I think He receives more glory through limping people who are dependent on Him, than healthy people who breeze through life independent of Him."

Connecting the dots between my physical limp and my friend's emotional limp encouraged her greatly. Just as I was deeply encouraged by the godly response of my pastor, [Todd Wagner](#) of Watermark Community Church in Dallas, to the news that he has cancer in his foot. He wrote to his church family:

"So grateful for the prayers so many of you have offered on my behalf. I covet them for both wisdom in dealing with sarcoma (the cancer affecting my body) but especially sin (the cancer constantly waging war with my soul). There is no greater kindness than your earnest prayer for me. . . . In the coming weeks I will be watching, monitoring, imaging, praying, continually consulting with caring docs, and trusting in a good and sovereign God Who is never asleep. Having to trust my perfect Father with one more thing is no burden—it is a blessing. Anything that reminds me of His goodness and my futility is a gift. Thank you for praying with me... may my every decision honor my King and may my every step—whether with two feet or one, with cancer or without – find me running hard in His way. Pray for my health... but double down on the health of my walk with Him over my ability to walk physically. If He will allow me both I rejoice. ***If the days ahead allow for only one, I would gladly choose to limp in this life over anything that would compromise my running toward His presence in faithfulness.*** (Habakkuk 3:17-19)" (Emphasis mine)

Can you imagine how Todd's last sentence made my heart soar?

But it doesn't end there. Watermark's worship pastor, [Jon](#)

[Abel](#), “plays with a limp.” Several years ago, when mowing his lawn, his lawnmower blade sliced off his finger—his wedding ring finger, which he uses every day as a guitar player. The trauma of losing his finger, with the attendant threat of losing his livelihood, forced him to come face to face with the question of whether a good and loving God was in control. Jon’s godly response to this trial, which is documented in this short YouTube video, is one reason he is one of my favorite worship leaders of all time.

I recently learned from my sister—on Facebook, of all places!—that the doctors told my mother I would never walk. Mom decided they were wrong, and worked patiently with me every day, exercising my once-paralyzed leg in the bathtub as she taught me the ABCs and who knows what else.

I don’t know why my mother didn’t tell me this fact, but I do know this: *limping means I can walk!*

I am grateful for the gift of perspective. Whether it’s my polio-caused limp, or Todd’s possibility of limping from losing a foot, or Jon’s limited ability to play guitar from a once-severed finger, I just know that if God can be more glorified from our limps than from physical perfection, we’ll take the holy limp every time.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/a-holy-limp/ on November 15, 2013

Recalibrating Our Phones, Our

Minds

November 5, 2013

At 2:00 a.m. Sunday morning, most of us in the U.S. reverted back to standard time. Something almost magical happened to our smartphones, tablets, computers and TV cable boxes: the time automatically jumped back an hour.

When we travel across time zones, our smartphones automatically recalibrate to the correct time because they are informed by the cell phone system, which is always aware of what time it is in every location.

I recently landed in Germany, and when I turned my phone back on and watched the numbers flip from 2:10 a.m. to 9:10 a.m., it occurred to me that regular time in God's word has the same effect on our minds. If we approach God's word with a submissive, teachable spirit, it recalibrates our wrong thinking, bringing it into alignment with reality and truth.

One of my dear friends lived 25 years of her life as a gay activist before she met Christ. She told God that she was going to spend a year gathering the information she needed to prove to Him and everyone else that He had made her gay and there was nothing wrong with it. As she started reading His word daily, she found herself slowly changing her view of gender, sexuality, and her identity. It took less than a year for her to come to the point of saying, "OK, I was wrong. I choose to reconcile my faith and my sexuality by submitting to God's intention and design."

Another dear friend recently asked me about gambling, since she had allowed nearby casinos to consume large chunks of her income. It had never occurred to her to investigate what God says about it, and when I offered her a link to an [article](#) on

that topic on the Probe.org website, she was astonished. She now sees all money as God's money, of which He entrusts some into her hands to steward wisely.

At Probe Ministries, we regularly receive emails from people who fear they have committed the unforgivable sin, begging for reassurance. It is a joy to provide biblical wisdom and urge them to let go of their fears. (Bottom line: people who have hardened their hearts to the point of taking themselves beyond receiving forgiveness, don't ask questions about it!)

I know a number of people whose lives are being wrecked by unremitting anger toward others. Once they submit to God's commands to forgive those who have sinned against us, they find they don't have to be angry anymore.

I will never forget how the truth of God's word crashed into my college-age wrongheaded thinking about sexuality when I trusted Christ as a sophomore. I had *so much* wrong! A wise friend handed me a cassette tape by Josh McDowell called "Maximum Sex" that changed everything for me, because it was full of God's truth.

Romans 12:2 urges us to "be transformed by the renewing of your minds." Marinating ourselves in God's word is the key to that transformation. You just might find the numbers flipping in your own mind!

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/recalibrating_our_phones_our_minds

The 3 As: Attention, Affection and Affirmation

Wise people have observed that we all have legitimate, God-given needs for “the 3 As”: attention, affection and affirmation. God intends for children to receive them from their parents first, laying a foundation of a healthy sense of self, then from their peers.

The Attention need is met by being there, listening, watching, engaging and interacting. Ever hear the famous line, “Daddy, watch me!”? One wise father told another whose daughter kept clamoring for him to look at her as she played in the back yard, “If you don’t watch her now, soon she’ll look for another guy to give her the attention she wants from YOU.”

The Affection need is met both physically and verbally. We all need hugs and safe touch. And most boys need the rough-housing kind of physical affection from their dads that says, “You belong in the world of males.” We need to hear the verbal affection of “I love you,” terms of endearment, and other forms of communicating love.

The Affirmation need is met by validating people’s feelings, efforts, skills and gifting. Noticing and commenting when they do things right—or even try. It communicates, “I am for you” and “I believe in you.”

Jesus received the Three As at His baptism. His Father and the Spirit showed up [attention], and the Father pronounced, “This is My beloved Son [affection] in whom I am well pleased [affirmation]” (Matthew 3:17).

Much unhealthy, dysfunctional behavior is driven by trying to get these three needs met, usually without realizing what is driving us. Unfortunately, it’s getting harder than ever to get these needs met because of two things proliferating in our

culture.

First, families seem to be growing more fractured and more dysfunctional than ever before. Fatherlessness is at epidemic stage. The National Fatherhood Initiative cites the U.S. Census Bureau's statistic that one out of three American children live in homes without their biological father.[{1}](#) Parents in the home are often stressed, overwhelmed, and so self-focused, whether on selfishness or mere survival, that many children feel like they are on their own. Plus, the people God intends to fill their children's emotional tanks with attention, affection and affirmation—parents—are often scrambling to try to get their OWN tanks filled. So there is a sense of disconnection at home.

Second, smartphone technology has moved into the hands—and heads—of the majority of Americans. Over half of adults own smartphones, and a recent report from the Pew Research Center revealed that 78% of young people ages 12-17 now have cell phones, and nearly half of those are smartphones.[{2}](#) That means continual connection to the internet. That means billions of text messages daily, which have virtually replaced phone calls for many people, especially youth.[{3}](#) The camera on most people's cell phone means that many people view life's experiences, from wedding processions to grade school concerts to street fights, through a 3-to-4-inch screen held away from the body.

In short, we're doing life through a screen.

And that screen is an additional layer of disconnection between people. Technology has created a superficial degree of counterfeit connection, and relationships are suffering. People think they're connected to other people through their phones, but in reality they're connected to their phones and a counterfeit kind of "life."

God knew what He was doing when He stressed the importance of

staying in connection, continually engaging with each other: I count 41 “one anothers” in scripture.^{4} He knew what He was doing when He instructed believers to make sure and keep meeting together to encourage one another (Heb. 10:24).

God put needs for the Three A’s inside us, and He intends for us to meet them through connection to other people. Please, hug somebody. Tell them they’re important and valuable. Be there for them.

And you might want to put down your phone.

Notes

1.

www.fatherhood.org/media/consequences-of-father-absence-statistics Accessed 09/10/13.

2.

www.pewinternet.org/Media-Mentions/2013/More-youth-use-smartphones-as-route-to-Web.aspx Accessed 09/10/13.

3.

www.businessinsider.com/chart-of-the-day-number-of-texts-sent-2013-3 Accessed 09/10/13.

4. www.mecf.net/one_anothers.html Accessed 09/10/13.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_3_as_attention_affection_and_affirmation on Sept. 10, 2013.

“Are Aliens Really Evil

Angels? Why Did They Take the Book of Enoch Out of the Bible?"

I was just wondering if so-called aliens are evil angels from the old times, or where do they fit into God's plans. I already know they have been here since the beginning of time and they are behind this new world order supporting the devil. I figured out that myself and the people are working for them and cover up lots of stuff in exchange for weapons and greed but in the end they will be the fools. Just wondering if I'm right and why did they take the Book of Enoch out of the Bible—what else are they hiding? They're trying to fool people into thinking they're God, but they hold a more insidious agenda. People need to know the truth! Am I right or wrong?

Thanks for writing to Probe.

1. We suggest that aliens actually do not exist, but demons (evil angels) successfully role-play aliens to deceive people. Satan has been a deceiver since he first approached Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the evil angels who rebelled along with him have been deceiving people ever since.

We have a couple of articles on aliens you may find helpful to shape your understanding on aliens from a biblical perspective:

[UFOs and Alien Beings: A Christian Response](#)

[Are We Alone in the Universe? A Biblical View of Aliens](#)

2. The Book of Enoch was never IN the Bible, so it was never taken out. One of our theologians answered a question about that book here: [“What Can We Know About Enoch?”](#)

Since you are curious about what is true (good for you!), let

me encourage you to read this short answer to the question, [**“How did the Church Recognize Which Books Were Inspired by God?”**](#).

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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Think You Can Get Away With It?

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Several years ago I began to notice how many people buy into a disturbing fantasy.

First, I watched a dear friend jump into a sinful and dangerous relationship. She tried to numb her guilt through drugs, alcohol and self-injury, in escalating amounts of each. She ended up losing her job and her freedom—first in a hospital, then a psych ward, and then months in a rehab facility that consumed every penny of her considerable savings. Later she confessed to me, “I thought I could get away with it.”

This summer I served over a month on a jury for a drug conspiracy trial. (I blogged about that [here](#).) After we found all four defendants guilty, the judge came to talk to us and answer our questions. We learned that a large number of co-conspirators indicted along with these defendants had all pled guilty. The judge confirmed to us that these four had “rolled

the dice," hoping to persuade a jury that they were unjustly charged. Why didn't these men plead guilty? They thought they could get away with it.

Thinking we can get away with it happens a lot, from speeding to not declaring everything on our tax returns to the U.S. government monitoring its citizens' phone conversations.

And this fantasy—this LIE—goes back a long way. All the way to the Garden of Eden, when the serpent scoffed at God's rule about not eating from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "Surely you will not die!" (Gen. 3:4) In today's language: "C'mon, you can get away with it!"

But, being sneaky, the enemy of our souls (and his minions who are the spirits who actually tempt us with lies) uses first person to make us think his thoughts are actually our own, so we are not aware of the source of our temptation: "I can get away with this."

God has something to say about this lie. One of my favorite Bible verses, particularly when my sons were small, is Numbers 32:23: "Be sure your sin will find you out."

There were three four-year-olds on our street including my son. One of them, a heartbreakingly sexually precocious little girl, said to Kevin one day, "Let's go behind this bush next to my house, take off our clothes and kiss." When he said no, she insisted, "It's okay. Jordan (the other four-year-old) and I did it yesterday, and no one will know." Kevin said, "But God will see us, and He'll tell my mommy!"

Back to God's opinion. Jesus said in Mark 4:22, "Everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light." In Luke 12:3, He said, "Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms will be proclaimed from the housetops."

Paul wrote in Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”

No, we *can't* get away with it. That's a truth that can keep us out of a lot of trouble!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/think-you-can-get-away-with-it/

Mad at God

I knelt down next to my bed, ten years old, and once more poured out my heart to God. “God, *please heal me!* You know how much I hate having polio, I hate limping, I hate going to physical therapy every week, I hate the surgeries, I hate the way people stare at me because of how I walk. I hate that no one could love me with polio. I hate this, God! I know You can take it away—please let me wake up tomorrow morning all healed and restored!” Once again, I fell asleep, hopeful that God had heard me and He was able to snap His fingers or wiggle His nose or however He did miracles. And in the morning, once again, I discovered that during the night *God had done absolutely nothing.*

And I was FURIOUS!

“You're God! This is an easy one for You! What's wrong with You that You won't do something so easy as healing me???” Then, my little ten-year-old heart gasped, “I'm mad at God! People aren't supposed to get mad at God!” And I gathered up my explosive anger and stuffed it into the emotional basement of my heart, along with all the other times I had begged God to heal me . . . and His silent inactivity kept saying no.

Once I trusted Christ as a college student, a wise woman saw my heart full of anger, bitterness and resentment, and prayed that God would show me my heart, knowing that my anger at God was a far bigger problem than legs that don't work right. Remembering this ten-year-old memory, and the awareness there were a lot more just like it, was an answer to her prayer.

So I prayed, "God, I don't have a clue what to do. My heart is full of anger, bitterness and resentment. I am angry at You, Lord, because You won't give me what I want. I've never heard a message on 'What to do when you're so mad at God you want to spit in His face.' Please show me what to do about it."

God understands why we get angry at Him, just as a parent, possessing adult perspective, understands why a child gets angry at her. That adult understanding allows the parent to experience—and to show—grace toward a child tormented by angry confusion and a juvenile sense of entitlement to what he or she wants. Just as a child can't possibly see the big picture, much less a parent's motive and intention, that's why we get mad at God.

It's about what we can't see. And God understands.

He knows we cannot see anything but the pain and frustration of the moment. We can't see the reason(s) God is allowing us to suffer. We can't see the greater evil that a loving heavenly Father is preventing us from experiencing through the lesser evil of pain in that moment. Or season. We can't know what's going on the spirit realm, just as Balaam's donkey (Numbers 23) saw the angel of the Lord blocking their path with a sword but Balaam didn't, and he unrighteously punished the donkey.

We can't see the eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17) and beauty that God is creating in our souls through our pain and suffering, and He usually doesn't tell us. But He did tell my friend Ann. In prayer one day she had a body memory of being sexually assaulted by a man who had paid her father for the right to have access to his little girl. She asked Jesus about what felt like a heavy blanket over her during the abuse. He gave her a mental picture of Himself lying protectively on top of her, taking into Himself much of the violence of the assault. Ann saw that before the man could even touch her, he had to go through Jesus as her shield, protecting her from the worst of the assault. In answer to her heart's cry of "Why?", the Lord told her, "You are My precious gem. My Father's hand is on the chisel, creating unimaginable beauty in you. He has used every assault on you to create yet another facet of a brilliant jewel. I promise, when you see yourself in heaven, you will say, 'It was totally worth it.'"



Now, I do realize that many people would gladly choose a less highly polished gem over the pain of abuse and suffering, but this was deeply encouraging to my wise and mature friend. I have watched God use her in mighty ways to minister hope and comfort to others in pain because of her willingness to relinquish her anger at what happened to her and trust God to bring good out of evil, to work all things together for good in her life (Rom. 8:28).

When I prayed, "God please show me what to do about my anger," He answered by teaching me about His sovereignty. I learned that a good and loving God is always in control, and nothing can touch me without His express permission. His perfect love and purpose for me—and His kingdom—is a shield around me (Ps. 28:7). By the time anything reaches me, whether it is a polio virus that crippled me for life or the disappointment of living in a fallen world, it has His fingerprints all over it.

He taught me that all the available facts are not all the facts. He taught me that I can only see a tiny sliver of the whole picture that He sees, and I need to trust His goodness with what I don't see.

There's more to the story, but you can read that [here](#).

What do we do when we're so mad at God we want to spit in His face? Repent of the wrong belief that we see the whole picture, and choose to trust the God who sees everything and has a purpose in it.

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blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/mad_at_god on August 14, 2013.

Exodus is Shutting Down, But Jesus Isn't

July 17, 2013

Recently, Exodus International announced that it was shutting down. For decades, Exodus was the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality. But in the past few years, it had become a lightning rod for controversy, and the name had accumulated a lot of baggage. They hoped that by shutting down the ministry, the church would step up and do its job of loving and leading people well. They realized that many churches and pastors are still under-educated about those who deal with same-sex attractions, and some are unsafe. But by having a separate ministry to send people to, they haven't needed to change, and it was easy for the unbiblical "us/them"

dichotomy to flourish.

This made the news because on the one hand, there is a lot of contempt and hatred for Exodus by gay activists who insist there's nothing wrong with homosexuality, and many considered it a victory. On the other hand, Exodus was the go-to place for people seeking help with this issue, and as the umbrella organization for scores of local ministries, they were able to refer people to places where they could find support. As a longtime board member for [Living Hope Ministries](#), the Exodus referral ministry for Dallas/Ft. Worth, I know how valuable the Exodus referrals have been.

How did this happen?

Over the past several years, Exodus got off track when some people promoted “gay to straight” change efforts, including the controversial reparative therapy technique. Both of these are nothing but “flesh management,” using natural, human-only tools and methods. They lost their focus on the founding values, which until recently was still found on their “About Us” page:

While we have never met anyone who “chose” to feel same-sex attracted, people do have to eventually make a decision to either act on those feelings or not to act on them. Since 1976, Exodus has served as an organization helping men and women surrender their sexual struggles to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We do not believe that same-sex attractions are sinful in and of themselves but rather one type of struggle and temptation among the millions that impact each and every human being.

We do believe that any sexual expression outside of a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman falls outside of God’s creative intent for human sexual expression and is sinful. Homosexuality is no greater or less a sin than any other and is not the determining factor for a

relationship with Jesus Christ. (emphasis mine)

What I see here is a statement pointing to God's standards, God's intent for human sexuality. It conforms to the limits of what the Bible actually says, which is a prohibition against acting on one's sinful desires regardless of what those desires are. It acknowledges that all of us are messed-up sinners who can't stop being sinners and can't stop our temptations, but we do have control over what we choose to do with our feelings and temptations.

Ricky Chelette, the Executive Director of Living Hope, says, "I have been to every Exodus Conference for the past 15 years and every Leader's Conference except this past year, and have always felt that we were centering on Christ, upholding God's truth, and encouraging people not so much to be "straight" but to be rightly and intimately related to Christ, which then transforms our lives, actions, hearts and thinking. Living Hope will continue to do what we have always done: 'Proclaim God's Truth to those who are seeking sexual and relational wholeness through a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.' Nothing has changed for us."

Since Living Hope is one of the largest, if not THE largest ministry of its kind in the world, I am encouraged that Kingdom values are still unshaken despite what's going on at Exodus headquarters.

I've had a lot of emails and messages asking "What does all this mean?" Well, I can tell you want it *doesn't* mean:

- It *doesn't* mean that Jesus is not enough for sexual struggles.
- It *doesn't* mean that He has left His throne and is no longer in control.
- It *doesn't* mean that there isn't any help for those dealing

with this issue, either for themselves or a loved one.

- It doesn't mean that it's pointless to fight against unwanted same-sex attraction (or any other temptation). By developing intimacy with Christ so that we are continually transformed into His image from one glory into another (2 Cor. 3:18), He changes and decreases the power of those temptations.
- It doesn't mean change isn't possible. Exodus coined the phrase "change is possible" and then backed off the hope of change. But people's personal filters about what kind of change led to unrealistic expectations about what they could expect.

Of course change is possible—it's an intrinsic part of being alive! Whether one is a believer or not, we change over time. The Christ-follower should expect change because we are transformed into what we worship. As we focus on Jesus, we become more like Him. That means greater holiness, more self-control, rightly relating to our own gender and to the opposite sex. As John the Baptist indicated, He increases and we decrease. That is change. Our attractions are also our temptations, and as my pastor says, "Jesus never promises to take away our temptations. He hasn't taken away mine either."

I recently said to my friend, a former lesbian activist, "You know, it's entirely possible your attractions to women won't change and you will walk with an emotional limp the rest of your life. . . just as I will continue to walk with a physical limp the rest of *my* earthly life. But both of us can glorify God in our limping by honoring Him with our choices, as we look to Him to restore us to a perfect future that includes running and jumping and leaping and loving perfectly, on the other side."

I know that may sound weird, "glorifying God in our limping," but I think He receives more glory through limping people who

are dependent on Him, than healthy people who breeze through life independent of Him.

Even though Exodus International is shutting down, Jesus Christ is still very much loving and changing those who turn to Him in trust and obedience. And I am grateful to be a part of it.

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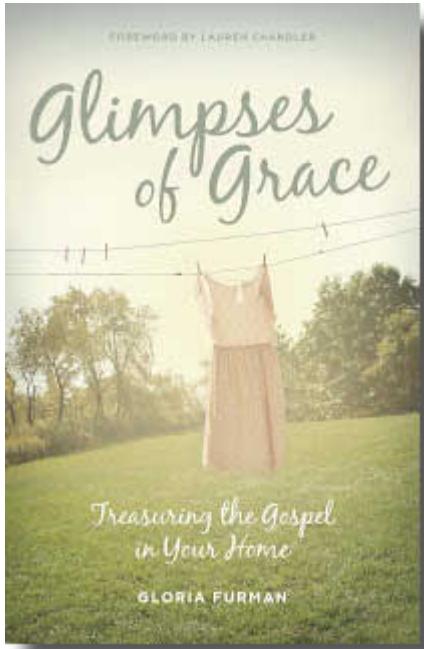
blogs.bible.org/engage/exodus-is-shutting-down-but-jesus-isnt

Glimpses of Grace: Knocking Down Mental Walls

One of the most spiritually dangerous mistakes we can make is to compartmentalize our thinking into separate sections: Facts/values. Sacred/secular.

Worst of all, God/real life.

If Jesus truly is Lord—and His word says He is—then there is not so much as a solitary atom, much less an entire compartment, where He does not belong. So I love, love, love it when writers and speakers help us tear down mental and spiritual walls to help us live life as a unified whole. And now there's a new voice to help women think biblically and rightly about how we glorify God in our homes.



This week marks the release of Gloria Furman's book *Glimpses of Grace: Treasuring the Gospel in Your Home*. I've never read a book that so thoroughly explores the way God's grace can so fully and vibrantly radiate into even the most mundane and seemingly unimportant parts of life.

This, on top of the fact that Gloria is a mom of three little ones with a fourth on the way, a pastor's wife, living in Dubai—and her husband Dave's physical strength is severely compromised, which of course means life is harder for Gloria. So yeah—I'm impressed. But Gloria's bio doesn't hold a candle to her wisdom, her grasp of theology, and what I especially appreciate, a breathtaking level of transparency and authenticity that eloquently communicates, "I'm messed up and I desperately need Jesus, but let me show you how He's so good!"

Her great, dry sense of humor is studded throughout the book, such as: "I need God's grace and something baked with peanut butter and chocolate." What's not to love?

Some of my highlighted passages, which I wanted to share with you:

- When I attended a marriage conference taught by Paul Tripp, he said something that devastated me. Tripp said, "If

God doesn't rule your mundane, then he doesn't rule you. Because that's where you live."

- God can use the ordinary moments in your life to glorify himself by conforming you into the image of his Son. That is precisely what he intends to do. Dirty dishes in the sink or red crayons smushed into an electrical socket by a curious toddler are not just worrisome ordeals in your otherwise uneventful day. They're opportunities to see glimpses of grace.
- Jesus apparently believes that the most satisfying thing for us in all eternity is to behold his glory in his very presence. He is not absent from our noisy, chaotic lives. He is with us, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). And if he's with us even to the end of the age, then he is with us even to the end of our carpooling route. He's with us even to the end of the meat in the fridge when grocery day isn't for another four days. He's with us even to the end of a long night of waking with a crying baby. He's with us even to the end of a party that we'd rather not be at or be hosting, for whatever reason. He's with us even to the end of a hectic morning of rushing around trying to get out the door. He's with us even to the end of a dreadful day when nothing seemed to go as planned.
- God's efficacious grace could be described in terms of the different ways you put pajamas on a baby. My son prefers to streak after he takes baths. He even tries to climb out of the tub early before everyone is soaped up and rinsed in order to increase his odds of getting to run around in his birthday suit. . . . But it's all fun and games until a naked baby has an accident on the carpet, so I quickly chase him down to put on his diaper. Some nights he runs away shrieking and hides under tables and behind chairs trying to avoid the inevitable. Some nights he quietly lies on the bed while I diaper him, and he might even stretch his legs into the pajamas I hold up. Either way, whether I have to wrestle

his clothes onto him or he peacefully submits to the work I am doing, that boy has never gone to bed without a diaper and pajamas on. Of course, we should love to submit to God's efficacious grace as he purposes to make us more like Christ! But sometimes we're like a naked baby hiding behind the couch, reluctant to hold still and thankfully allow God to work in our hearts and get us ready for what he has next.

- We're destined for joy forever because of Christ's exquisite hospitality in opening a way to God through his own body. We can serve others with gladness, knowing that the carrots we peel and the diapers we change are as unto the Lord. . . . When we show hospitality in this way, we can see how "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). Our role is to serve with the strength God supplies, and it's God's role to do with our service whatever he pleases. He supplies the strength, and in his abundant hospitality he also gives us joy! God's grace in Christ is for us to enjoy and share with others. When I have this grace in mind, I can see my possessions and others' needs in light of eternity.
- My disgusting kitchen floor and its propensity to absorb filth is a picture of our hearts. No matter how hard we scrub, we cannot erase our iniquity. The shame of our sin is like the phantom stain on a shirt that reappears after you've dried it. The stain is deep in the fibers of the shirt, and when the right temperature of heat is applied, the stain rises to the surface of the fabric. The stain is permanent.
- Not making an idol out of our homes is tricky. I've personally experienced what it feels like to be obsessed with the idea of organization in my home. I thought I was being driven by the maxim "God is a God of order and not chaos." I thought that if everything had a place, then my heart would feel at peace because strict orderliness is

godly. But instead of worshiping God, I just wanted to be in control. I was worshiping my image and thought it wouldn't be so bad if others admired me, too. . . . I've also had struggles with the idol of self-expression, seeing my home primarily as an extension of myself. If something was out of place or not just so, then I felt it reflected poorly on my personhood or character. Again I was serving my own image—not God's.

- Jesus is the sovereign Lord over every square centimeter in your home—from the pipes to the television to the mattresses. He is Lord over it, and he desires that you use what he's given you to glorify him. That doesn't mean that your home needs to be perfect by the world's standards or even by your own personal standards, but consecrated by God's standards. . . . In Romans 12:1-2 we see a description of what it means to set ourselves apart for God: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Since Jesus is lord over all things and God is subjecting all things under his feet (1 Cor. 15:27), including our homes, by his grace we use our homes to worship him.

See why I loved this book? Let the gospel permeate every square inch of your heart and your home. I bet *Glimpses of Grace* can help.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/glimpses-of-grace-knocking-down-mental-walls/
on June 4, 2013.

Headed to the Courtroom

June 18, 2013

Yesterday I was selected to serve on a jury for a trial that is anticipated to last three to four weeks. The jury selection process was an all-day affair, lasting over twelve hours and creating quite a sense of camaraderie in the process.

I keep thinking about the three major take-aways from this experience.

First, the multiple defense attorneys for the four defendants (thus the long trial) repeatedly reminded us that the American justice system is built on the foundation of “presumed innocent until proven guilty.” And that is a very, very good thing, as horror stories emerge from countries where instant “justice” is meted out in cutting off or crushing limbs of those accused of stealing. And in countries where “mob justice” is part of everyday life. (See my blog post [When God Does Nothing About Injustice](#).)

But it’s not like that before God. Not a single one of us can protest innocence. Not only is every single one of us a sinner from conception (Ps. 51:5), but God knows every thought we think before we ever act on it. A totally holy, perfect God knows that we may be innocent of crimes before other men, but we are not innocent before Him.

Except that Jesus swapped His perfection and righteousness for our messed up guilt. It’s like the judge coming down from his elevated seat, taking off his robes, and saying to a defendant that was just declared guilty, “I’ll be taking your punishment for you.” Amazing.

My second takeaway is gratitude for the teaching and experience in filtering life through a biblical filter. I am especially grateful for the wisdom of Proverbs 18:17—“The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.” All of us potential jurors were strongly encouraged to use common sense, and evaluate carefully everything we would hear. And (not surprisingly), the defense attorneys asked us not to draw any conclusions until we had heard everything. Those could be just platitudes, but since I know that God’s Word said it first, it is my determined course of action.

The third takeaway is the importance of embracing God’s right to put a long trial on my calendar. He is God; He has the right to interrupt my plans and put whatever He wants on my schedule. I had an idea of what I would be doing during the day over the next month, but God had different plans. I choose to trust Him and keep letting go of my impatient, wrong-headed belief that I should get to decide my agenda.

Then in one breathtaking moment, I had a paradigm shift that erupted in a heartfelt “Oh, *thank You Lord!*”: the realization that this is nothing compared to the way a cancer diagnosis crashes into one’s schedule, with a very different set of unwanted appointments on it. I’m pretty sure my sister Nanci, fighting breast cancer, would swap her chemo treatments with my courtroom dates in a heartbeat.

So the adventure with God continues . . .

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/headed-to-the-courtroom

Honor Thy (Very Flawed) Father and Mother

July 30, 2013

Someone asked me about how to resolve the biblical command to “Honor thy father and mother” (Ex. 20:12) with the fact that these people may have had huge and damaging flaws. I suggested googling the phrase “honoring your parents” for some insight. Below are some links I found helpful.

But as I told her, one aspect of honoring flawed parents is to understand that the best (or even only) way you might be able to honor them is from a distance, emotionally and physically. You can give yourself permission to do that.

To give them honor means showing (not necessarily *feeling*) respect, letting them know you are listening and considering what they say. (And it does not necessarily mean following through!) To give them honor means being civil and kind in your dealings with them. It does not mean trusting them. It does not mean placing yourself in harm’s way. It means forgiving them, so that you are not carrying and paying for the emotional baggage of their treatment of you. And please remember that forgiveness is given, but trust is earned, so it’s entirely possible that you can release the woundings you sustained from them without ever, ever trusting them with your heart, because they don’t deserve your trust.

Honoring flawed parents means you have healthy boundaries so that you know where you end and they begin. It means you learn how to protect yourself so that they can’t steamroll over you; it also means you have realistic expectations about what they can and cannot give you or do for/to you. (You may need some help adjusting your expectations.) For instance, in our family there is a family member who has never, ever said the words

"thank you." I mean, not even if you pass the salt, or do something they specifically asked! (I think this qualifies as "flawed," don't you?) It is unrealistic to expect that to change. It is an exercise in futility to expect anything different than a lifelong pattern of non-communication. Honoring this person means letting go of the futile hope to ever hear something as simple as "thank you," much less the more profound "I'm proud of you" or even "I love you"! Honoring this person means letting go of unrealistic expectations so we don't set ourselves up for continued disappointment and heartache. (An excellent book is *Boundaries* by Drs. John Townsend and Henry Cloud, and I taught a 7-week study on this book which is available [here](#) on Bible.org.)

Finally, let me share with you the insight of Dallas Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy*:

"To honor our parents means to be thankful for their existence and to respect their actual role as givers of life in the sequence of human existence. Of course in order to honor them in this way we need to be thankful for our own existence too. But we also will usually need to have pity on them. For, even if they are good people, it is almost always true that they have been quite wrong in many respects, and possibly still are."

"Commonly those who have experienced great antagonism with their parents are only able to be thankful for their existence and honor them, as they deeply need to, after the parents have grown old. Then it is possible to pity them, to have mercy on them. And that opens the door to honoring them. With a certain sadness, perhaps, but also with joy and peace at least. One of the greatest gifts of The Kingdom Among Us is the healing of the parent-child relation, 'turning the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers' (Mal. 4:6)."

Honor My Mother And Father? How Should I Treat My Abusive Parents?

www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/questions/parentingandfamily/honormymotherandfather.html

What Does It Mean to Honor Your Parents? (in this case, when a parent has dementia)

http://www.newhopenow.com/ask/honor_parents.html

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/honor_thy_very_flawed_father_and_mother