

Four Killer Questions: Power Tools for Great Question-Asking

Sue Bohlin provides helpful information for use in helping sharpen the question-asking skills of fellow believers as well as in evangelism. These “understanding questions” help Christians sharpen their biblical worldview and help unbelievers delve into the inconsistencies of their own worldview.

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



He suggests four “killer questions” to help anyone think critically.[\[1\]](#) The first question is, *What do you mean by that?* In other words, define your terms. The second question is, *Where do you get your information?* The third is, *How do you know that’s true?*, and the fourth killer question is, *What if you’re wrong?*

Dr. Myers tells this story:

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

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

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

"'Lady, how do you know that is true?'"

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

Question #1: What do you mean by that?

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

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

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

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

Question #2: Where do you get your information?

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

"I heard it somewhere." Well, how's that for reliable? Follow with another killer question, *How do you know it's true?*

"Everybody says so." That may be so, but is it true? If you

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Most people aren't aware of what they assume is true; there's

simply no other way to see the world. They often believe what they believe without asking if it's true, if it aligns with reality. If you respectfully ask killer questions like *How do you know that's true?*, all of a sudden it can begin to occur to folks that what they believe, they believe by faith. But where is their faith placed?

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

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

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

Postmodern thought says that no one can know truth. This philosophy has permeated just about every college campus. To the professor who asserts, "No one can know truth," a student should ask, *How do you know that's true?* If that sounds slightly crazy to you, good! A teacher who says there is no truth, or that if there is, no one can know it, says it

because he or she believes it to be true, or they wouldn't be saying it!

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

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

So many people have embraced a pragmatic, expedient standard of, "Hey, it works for me." "It works for me to cheat on my taxes, as long as I don't get caught." "It works for me to spend hours on porn sites late at night since my wife doesn't know how to check the computer's history." "It works for me to keep God in his corner of the universe while I do my own thing; I'll get religious later in life." Well, *how do you know* it works? You haven't seen the whole, big picture. You

can't know the future, and you can't know how tomorrow's consequences will be reaped from today's choices.

Let me add a caveat here. The underlying question behind *How do you know that's true?* is really, "Why should I believe you?" It can be quite disconcerting to be challenged this way, so be sure to ask with a friendly face and without an edge in your voice.

Question #4: What if you're wrong?

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

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

The ultimate question where this matters is, *What do you believe about God?* What do you do with Jesus' statement "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by Me"?{5} What if you believe there is no God, or that you can live however you want and God will let you into heaven because you're not a mass murderer? We need to ask, *What if you're wrong?* You will be separated from God forever!

It's only fair for Christ-followers to ask that of ourselves.

What if we're wrong? What if we're actually living an illusion that there is a God and a purpose to life? I would say, "You know what? I still lived a great life, full of peace and purpose and fulfillment. Ultimately, if there were no God, it wouldn't matter—nothing would matter at all!—but I still loved my life. Either way, if I'm right or I'm wrong, I win."

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

Notes

1. Our fellow worldview apologist Bill Jack of Worldview Academy (www.worldview.org) has also popularized these "killer questions," but they go back all the way to Socrates.
2. "Created Male and Female: Biblical Light for a Sexually Darkened World" conference sponsored by the International Council for Gender Studies, October 10-12, 2003.
3. 1 Peter 3:15.
4. www.fortunecity.com/emachines/e11/86/duncan2.html
5. John 14:6.

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Abortion: A Biblical View

Sue Bohlin calls for a spiritual and moral reflection on the topic of abortion, urging people to consider the eternal implications and affirming that God's love, grace, and forgiveness extend even to those who have committed this sin.



An earlier version of this article is also available in

Abortion as Spiritual Warfare

Abortion continues to be a volatile issue, and an emotional one, in the United States. It is usually seen as a political issue, but I think it's way bigger than that.

I believe we need to see abortion as spiritual warfare.



We live in two dimensions at the same time: the physical world that we can see and touch and measure, and the unseen spiritual realm that is filled with God, angels and demons (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). Jesus revealed to us that Satan is the thief who “comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10); abortion is one of the most wicked, heinous ways he inflicts pain and destruction on people God loves.

He steals joy and peace from women who have had abortions, as well as some of the fathers of the babies who were killed in the womb. He steals babies from what should be the safest place on earth. He steals motherhood from women and fatherhood from men. Through abortion, he steals grandchildren from grandparents.

Satan uses abortion to kill. Just in the United States, since Roe v. Wade made abortion legal, over 64 million babies have been murdered.[{1}](#) In China, the horrible one-child policy that terrorized the Chinese people for 35 years resulted in 350 million baby deaths.[{2}](#)

Satan uses abortion to destroy. Willingly choosing abortion for a pregnant teenager has been Satan's foothold in many families that were torn apart, a phenomenon I have seen with my own eyes. Abortion—and its evil twin infanticide—destroyed

the natural ratio of boys to girls in China. Today, there are 30 million young men who cannot find a girl to marry because there aren't enough to go around.[\[3\]](#)

The rallying cry of abortion is, "It's my body"—even though there is another human being's body involved as well. Theologian Dr. Peter Kreeft's insight is breathtaking to me: "Abortion is the Antichrist's demonic parody of the Eucharist. That is why it uses the same holy words, 'This is my body,' with the blasphemously opposite meaning."[\[4\]](#)

Abortion is an evil weapon in the hands of an unspeakably evil enemy. In Genesis 3, Satan declared war on the people God created and loves, and he has been warring with us ever since. The Lord Jesus triumphed over this defeated foe at the cross, but He allows battles to continue on this side of eternity to strengthen us and help us learn to depend on Him and grow stronger in our faith. In this article we'll be talking about the spiritual battlefield of abortion, but please remember that not only does Jesus win in the end, He has provided us with spiritual armor that starts with TRUTH. Let's go there now.

The Bible's View of the Unborn

Pro-choice advocates don't like the use of the word "murder." Many of them maintain that no one really knows when human life begins, and they choose to believe that the idea of personhood at conception is a religious tenet and therefore not valid. But it is a human life that is formed at conception. The zygote contains 46 chromosomes, half contributed by each parent, in a unique configuration that has never existed before and never will again. It is not plant life or animal life, nor is it mere tissue like a tumor. From the moment of conception, the new life is genetically different from his or her mother, and is not a part of her body like her tonsils or appendix. This new human being is a separate individual living inside the mother. Rather like an astronaut being protected

and kept alive in space.

The Bible doesn't specifically address the subject of abortion, probably since it is covered in the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder." (Exodus 20:13) But it does give us insight into God's view of the unborn. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for the unborn (*yeled*) is the same word used for young children. The Hebrew language did not have or need a separate word for pre-born babies. All children were children regardless of whether they lived inside or outside the womb. In the New Testament, the same word is used to describe the unborn John the Baptist and the already-born baby Jesus. The process of birth just doesn't make any difference concerning a baby's worth or status in the Bible.

We are given some wonderful insights into God's intimate involvement in the development and life of the pre-born infant in Psalm 139:13-16:

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully
and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book before one of them came to be.

All people, regardless of the circumstances of their conception, or whether they are healthy or handicapped, are God's image bearers who have been personally knit together by His fingers. He has planned out all the days of the unborn child's life before one of them has happened.

Chemical Abortion: “The Abortion Pill”

Chemical abortions now account for the majority of induced abortions in the U.S.[{5}](#)

Two drugs are used in tandem to end a pregnancy. The first pill, RU-46 or Mifepristone or Mifeprex (all the same drug), shuts down progesterone. That’s the pregnancy hormone that the developing embryo or fetus needs to survive and thrive. Progesterone allows the mother’s body to feed and nourish and oxygenate the baby. The first abortion pill blocks progesterone, so the baby dies. Then the next drug, Misoprostol or Cytotec, causes the uterus to contract and squeeze out the baby and other pregnancy tissue like the placenta.[{6}](#)

These drugs are very disruptive to the natural progress of growing a baby inside a womb. They are unfortunately quite effective up to seven weeks’ gestation, and then their effectiveness drops off. By the time the baby is ten weeks along, for one in six women the drugs won’t fully empty the uterus. Dangerous complications can set in, like:

- An infection caused by an incomplete or failed abortion where the fetus remains in the uterus
- An undetected ectopic pregnancy, which can be dangerous and is a medical emergency
- Blood clots remaining in the uterus
- Heavy bleeding

What is also scary is that chemical abortions are so easy to obtain they are like over-the-counter medications. No doctor is needed to supervise. If a woman has an ectopic pregnancy, where the embryo grows in her Fallopian tube instead of her uterus, she’s going to have awful pain and needs a sonogram to see where the baby is. Some of the deaths from Mifeprex abortions were from women that never had an ultrasound; they were given the drug and they had a pregnancy in their tube,

and they died.

Thousands of women experience complications, called “adverse events” that require hospital intervention, but the FDA does not require adverse events to be reported unless someone dies. The abortion pill is being touted as being “safe as Tylenol,” which is a life-threatening lie.[\[7\]](#) But then, abortion is spiritual warfare, and the enemy constantly lies and deceives us.

But there is good news! Many times, even while swallowing the abortion pills and immediately afterwards, women wrestle with regret for starting the regimen. There is a protocol called [Abortion Pill Reversal](#) where a doctor prescribes a dose of progesterone, the pregnancy hormone, to counteract what the mifepristone did. If started quickly enough within 72 hours of a woman taking mifepristone and before she takes the second drug, there is about a 70% chance of saving her child![\[8\]](#) Thank You Lord!

Handicapped Children

What if prenatal tests reveal that a baby is going to be born sick or handicapped? There’s no doubt about it, raising a handicapped child is painful and hard. Is it ever okay to abort a child whose life will be less than perfect?

We need to ask ourselves, does the child deserve to die because of his handicap or illness? Life is hard, both for the handicapped person and for her parents. But it is significant that no organization of parents of mentally retarded children has ever endorsed abortion.

Some people honestly believe that it’s better to abort a handicapped child than to let him experience the difficult life ahead. Dr. C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General of the United States, has performed thousands of pediatric surgeries on handicapped children. He remarks that

disability and unhappiness do not necessarily go together. Some of the unhappiest children he has known had full mental and physical faculties, and some of the happiest youngsters have borne very difficult burdens.{9} Life is a lot harder for people with disabilities, but I can tell you personally that there is a precious side to it as well. [I have lived most of my life with a physical handicap](#), but it hasn't stopped me from experiencing a fierce joy from living life to the fullest of the abilities I *do* have. I can honestly rejoice in my broken body because it is that very brokenness and weakness that makes it easier for others to see the power and glory of my Lord in me, because His power is perfected in weakness.

Often, parents abort children with defects because they don't want to face the certain suffering and pain that comes with caring for a handicapped individual. By aborting the child, they believe they are aborting the trouble. But as we discussed earlier, there is no way to avoid the consequences of abortion: the need to grieve, the guilt, the anger, the depression.

What if a baby is going to die anyway, such as those with fatal genetic birth disorders? I think we need to look at the larger picture, one that includes God and His purposes for our lives. When a tragedy like this occurs, we can know that it is only happening because He has a reason behind it. God's will for us is not that we live easy lives, but that we be changed into the image of Jesus. He wants us to be holy, not comfortable. The pain of difficult circumstances is often His chosen method to grow godliness in us and in the lives of those touched by the tragedy of a child's handicap. When it is a matter of life and death, as abortion is, it is not our place to avoid the pain.

My husband and I know what it is to bury a baby who only lived nine days. We saw God use this situation to draw people to Himself and to teach and strengthen and bless so many people beyond our immediate family. Despite the tremendous pain of

that time, now that I have seen how God used it to glorify Himself, I would go through it again.

Not all abortions are performed as a matter of convenience. Some are performed in very hard cases, such as a handicapped child or as the result of rape or incest. But again, we need to back off and view abortion—for whatever reason—from an eternal perspective. God is the One who gives life, and only He has the right to take it away. Every person, born or unborn, is a precious soul made by God, in His image. Every life is an entrustment from God we need to celebrate and protect.

Post-Abortion Syndrome

Millions of women live with the emotional and physical aftershock of abortion. Although some do not seem to have been rocked by their choice, many many women live with deep guilt and shame and denial. Some live with the physical effects of the hormonal shock of suddenly ending the massive construction job of their body building another human being inside her womb. It's something like throwing a car into park when it was going full speed down the road.

Post-abortion syndrome or stress disorder is real for many women. The grief is real; the deep loss of the child is real. And many people need help facing the pain and getting through it. I asked a dear friend about her experience. It's been 48 years since her abortion. She wrote to me,

“Though the procedure was fairly easy, I knew the second it was over that I had done the wrong thing. I left that clinic empty, guilty, and depressed. It was the start of a lifetime of sadness and regret. I told no one other than my husband and kept that secret for over 30 years. I suffered in silence. I knew then that I had made the choice to end a human life.

“When I became pregnant later, the sadness and guilt actually multiplied. When I could feel the baby inside me, the intense feelings of shame and guilt consumed me for ending my first child’s life. When my daughter was born and I held her for the first time and looked into her eyes, as happy as I was to have her, I also felt the worst pain I had ever felt because of what I had done 7 years earlier.”

Ending another’s life, whether freely chosen or being pressured into it, is capital-T Trauma. The woman is shaped and changed by this trauma, and I am so grateful for abortion recovery programs. They help women (and men, though there are far fewer programs for [Forgotten Fathers](#)) to experience grace and compassion as they confess their sin and receive forgiveness and cleansing from Jesus, *who died for their abortion*.

Abortion is a hard choice for which there are hard consequences. But God’s love and compassion and grace are bigger than all of it, and there is such good news in Romans 8:28—God is able to make all things work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Notes

1. nrlc.org/communications/0123saus/
2. www.wired.com/story/china-one-child-policy-in-numbers/
3. youtu.be/u6t0e7naoEw?si=VGq2XzV8PDsWRfxs
4. www.churchpop.com/its-my-body-how-abortion-is-the-opposite-of-the-eucharist/
5. www.cnn.com/2024/03/18/health/abortion-data-guttmacher/index.html

6.

www.biola.edu/blogs/think-biblically/2021/the-over-the-counter-abortion.

7. aaplog.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/20230728-Chem-Ab-One-Page.pdf

8. aaplog.org/abortion-pill-reversal/

9. C. Everett Koop, "The Slide to Auschwitz," in Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 45-46.

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"Why Can't We Talk to Our Loved Ones Who Have Passed?"

Why can't we talk to our loved one who has passed? I am having a very hard time with death and the feeling that it is cruel that we can't know our loved one is ok. My years of church taught me to know of God's love for us which gives us eternal life, but the cruelty of not knowing how our loved one is or their terrible suffering seems so unlike the personality I have had of God.

Dear _____,

I am so sorry for your heartache at missing your loved one. I truly understand; it's only been a few months since [we lost our son](#) and we miss him very much.

I think God uses the heartache of losing communication with our loved ones to remind us that death and separation was not

part of His original good creation, so we gain a fuller understanding of the impact of sin on our world—and why it required something as huge as the death of God’s Son to rectify. I also believe God redeems the pain of grief so we can learn how to turn to Him as “the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3). If we were able to communicate with our loved ones, it would be so easy to bypass God altogether and just seek to connect with our friends and family—just as we so often do with those with us on earth.

We are so limited by our earthly existence, we can’t begin to imagine the intense joy and glory of our believing loved ones’ life in heaven. And if you could see your unbelieving loved one in the torment of hell, would that bring you any peace, or would it rip you apart inside? I think that “not knowing” is the grace of God for us still here on earth.

It’s interesting and poignant that you used the word “cruelty.” And it’s easy to think that it’s God who is being cruel. But the true source of cruelty in our enemy, Satan, whose agenda is to “steal, kill and destroy” (John 10:10). It was his idea to inflict immeasurable pain on us as God’s image-bearers by bringing sin into the Garden of Eden.

We do know in Deuteronomy 18 that God forbids us try to contact the dead. He even calls it an abomination. All of God’s prohibitions are given to us for our protection and blessing, so like with so many other things, there must be something about God’s “no” in this issue that is meant for our good.

The Got Questions website has a couple of articles you may find helpful as well:

[If we talk to loved ones who have died, do they hear us?](#)

[Can I ask God to deliver a message to a loved one who has died?](#)

_____, I send this with a prayer for the God of all comfort

to give you His comfort as you trust Him in His goodness. And in Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 3:16, "Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way."

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

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When Gratitude and Grief Hold Hands

Sue Bohlin has discovered that the ongoing habit of giving thanks for God's many goodnesses has mitigated her grief in her son's death.

It's been five months since [our son took his life](#) and we were thrown into a sea of grief. I can tell people are still praying for us because God's deep and beautiful grace is holding us up.

The day after Curt died, I was struck with the thought that a gigantic wall of awful grief was going to hit me. Hard. I knew that wall. It slammed into me the first time when our firstborn baby Becky died on her eighth day of life. It slammed into me again almost two years ago when [a third of my tongue was cut out](#) because of cancer. So I know how to recognize the unbidden, overwhelming feelings of loss and deep sadness.

But a second and comforting thought chased down the chilling first thought: *The Lord carried me through those times of great grief in the past, and He will carry me again. I don't*

need to fear the grief monster because my God is bigger than the grief monster. Thank You, Lord, thank You.

That immediate prayer of thankfulness arose out of a 50-year-long habit that God impressed on me as a college student as I struggled to reconcile why a good God would let polio cripple me. I learned probably the biggest lesson of my life: that He wants us to give thanks not only **IN** all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18), but **FOR** all things (Ephesians 5:20). For a deeper dive, I invite you to read my blog post "[Giving Thanks for EVERYTHING?](#)"

I couldn't possibly know back in those early days of my walk with Christ how the habit of giving thanks as a way of life would shape how I could handle the unthinkable loss of a second child decades later.

Giving thanks as a daily habit began as a step of obedience, but then it grew to become an intrinsic part of my everyday life—to the point that I shoot up many more "thank You" prayers than "please" prayers. And that has never been so true as it has been these past five months.

ALL of my "please" prayers for Curt, as he struggled for years with a deep, dark suicidal depression I could not begin to imagine, have been turned into "thank You" prayers. Every day I tell the Lord how grateful I am that my son is experiencing a level of joy he couldn't have imagined any more than I can imagine the pain of his mental illness. I thank Him for the massive sense of relief that is Curt's daily life in heaven. I thank Him that his hearing loss has been replaced with perfect hearing. I thank Him that Curt's love of music, which was devastating because of that hearing loss, has been ratcheted up to enjoy new kinds of beautiful music (so I read in stories of those who have been allowed a glimpse of heaven). I thank Him that my son's deep suffering is only a memory for him now, and he has all eternity to look forward to whatever God will allow him to do. I thank Him that Curt can look forward with

clear eyes and unskewed thinking, to the next stages of his new life on the other side.

Every day I thank the Lord that I *know know know* where my son is, and that he is more alive today than he ever was on earth. I thank Him for the beloved family and friends who graduated to heaven before Curt, with whom he is enjoying restored fellowship and laughter and hugs. I thank the Lord for how real heaven is to me.

And because He has taught me how to turn hard truths into a “thank You,” I know what to do with the pangs of loss that inevitably strike me every day. When I see Curt’s handwriting on my recipes from the tweaking we did together when cooking, a fresh wave of missing him washes over me . . . and I’m able to say, “Thank You for all the help he gave me in the kitchen over these past 17 years of his living here.” When Ray and I wince at needing to find caregivers for our dog Lincoln when we go out of town—something we never needed to do because Curt never went anywhere—I’m able to say, “Thank You that he was our built-in dogsitter for all those years.”

When I see his computer components gathering dust in a corner, or when we need computer help, I’m able to chase the pangs of missing him with, “Thank You for the gift of having an IT genius in our home all those years.”

It might be easy to scoff and think, “You’re just sugar-coating this horrible loss of your beloved son. Get a grip and face your grief squarely instead of trying to paint it with rosy colors.”

But I am not a stranger to grief. I’ve endured a number of very big, very painful losses. I seek to be honest and authentic in this hard place we are in, but my reality is that gratitude softens the blow of grief. The Lord demonstrates His goodness to me in so many ways every day, I can’t help but see them because I’ve grown more sensitive to recognize what I

call His “hugs and kisses.” Those hugs and kisses are one way He comforts me in this hard time.

Because gratitude and grief CAN hold hands.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/when-gratitude-and-grief-hold-hands/ on December 17, 2024.

Laredo Apologetics Conference Videos

*Laredo Apologetics Conference
November 2024*



Videos from our Apologetics Conference in Laredo, Texas are now online [here](#).

“What Does It Mean to Be Made in the Image of God?”

How would you explain what it means to be made in the image of God to a brand new Christian or someone who hasn't made that

decision?

Great question! I think the bottom line is that God made us like Himself so that other parts of creation can see what He is like by looking at us and how we act. Since God is not physical, it's not a resemblance in our bodies, but is the immaterial, inside parts of us. Kind of like how family values and habits can be seen among family members. We are all made in the image of God, but sometimes people lie about what God is like when they act in ways that are NOT the image of God, such as cruelty or not being kind and loving.

Let me give you three different aspects of what I found.

Got Questions has a couple of good answers:

What does it mean that humanity is made in the image of God?

www.gotquestions.org/image-of-God.html

What does it mean when God said, "Let Us make man in Our image" (Genesis 1:26)?

www.gotquestions.org/let-Us-make-man-in-Our-image.html

And to my surprise, I really liked the answer I got from Meta AI with the prompt, *"Explain to a child what it means to be made in the image of God":*

What a wonderful topic!

So, you know how sometimes you might draw a picture of your family or friends? You try to make the drawing look like them, with their same smile, eyes, and hair. It's like a special copy of them.

Well, when the Bible says we're made in the image of God, it means that God created us to be like Him. Not exactly like Him, because He's God and we're humans, but we have some special qualities that are similar to His.

Here are a few things that make us like God:

We can love: Just like God loves us, we can love our family, friends, and even people we don't know. We can show kindness, care, and compassion to others.

We can think and create: God is super creative and wise. He made the whole universe! We can also think, imagine, and create things like art, music, and stories.

We have a conscience: God knows right from wrong, and He wants us to know the difference too. We have a special voice inside that helps us choose good over bad.

We can talk and communicate: God speaks to us through the Bible and in our hearts. We can talk to Him through prayer, and we can communicate with each other using words.

We are special and valuable: God thinks we're so valuable that He sent His own Son, Jesus, to save us. We're like precious jewels to Him!

Being made in God's image doesn't mean we're perfect, though. We still make mistakes and do things we shouldn't. But it means we have the potential to be like God in many amazing ways.

So, remember: you're a special creation, made to love, think, create, and shine like God!

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue

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The Pope Got It Wrong. Breathtakingly Wrong.

Sue Bohlin reacts to Pope Francis's recent statement that all religions are roads to God, providing a biblical answer to this false teaching.

Recently (9/13/2024) Pope Francis told a Singapore audience of youth from different faiths that all religions are equal, all different paths to God.

Through an interpreter, he said,

"If we start to fight among yourselves and say my religion is more important than yours, my religion is true and yours is not, where would that lead us. It is okay to discuss, because every religion is a way to arrive at God. Analogously speaking, religion is like different languages to arrive at God. But God is God for all. And if God is God for all, we are all sons and daughters of God. 'But my God is more important than your God.' Is that true? There is only one God, and each of us is a language, so to speak, to arrive at God. Muslim, Hindu, they are different paths. Understood?"^[1]

As the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church's 1.3 billion adherents, the pope is responsible for speaking truth to his flock. Not only is this statement heretical, it is a slap in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ—Whom the pope presumably worships and serves. If all religions lead to God, why did Jesus leave heaven to become a human being? Why did He submit Himself to the excruciating suffering of His passion and crucifixion? Why did the sinless, perfect God-man die? What's the point of His resurrection?

No. Different religious paths do not all lead to God. The pope is wrong wrong wrong. Those who believe what he's saying, trusting in their false religions, will remain enemies of God; their sin will forever separate them from God. This breaks my heart. Even as I type this, I pray for God to open the eyes of those embracing this Satanic lie so that they will turn in faith to the one true God.

Those who believe the "all religions lead to God" deception often invoke the story of the six blind Hindus who encountered an elephant. One felt its side and said, "An elephant is a wall." Another felt its leg and said, "An elephant is a tree trunk." A third felt its tusk and said, "An elephant is a spear." The fourth felt its trunk and said, "An elephant is a hose." The fifth felt its tail and said, "An elephant is a rope." The last one felt its ear and said, "An elephant is a fan."

The point of this allegorical story is that each person's encounter and description of the elephant in radically different ways is like the various world religions. None of them should claim to have the corner on truth because they all have different perspectives.

But this view leaves out the larger picture: an elephant is an elephant—not a wall or tree or spear or hose or rope or fan. And the Creator of the elephant has communicated with us the very nature of the "elephant." He has revealed capital-T Truth about reality, and He has been clear in how mankind is to relate rightly to Himself. This blind Hindu story leaves out the very important aspect of revelation, when Someone outside the limitations of our "blindness" as finite creatures, tells us things we cannot know on our own.

Which leads us to the ultimate reason why the Pope is so very wrong. The "Creator of the elephant," Jesus the Son of God, came to earth as a man and made astonishing truth claims about Himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes

to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

If all religions led to God, why would Jesus say He is the ONLY way?

He also claimed to be Yahweh, the covenant God of the Old Testament. “Before Abraham was, I AM.” (John 8:58).

He claimed for Himself attributes that are only true of God Himself:

Eternal “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” (John 17:5)

Omnipresent “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” (Matthew 18:20)

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Sinless “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?” (John 8:46)

Accepted worship “And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’ (Matthew 14:33)

Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:27-28)

Able to Forgive Sins And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:5)

“For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Then He said to her, “Your sins have been forgiven.” Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this man who even forgives

sins?" (Luke 7:48-50)

Judge of All Men "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice..." (John 5:24-28)

Jesus claimed to be God; He claimed to be the only way to the Father. He backed up these claims by fulfilling prophecy about the promised Messiah. And most phenomenal of all, He said He would die and rise from the dead three days later—and He did it.

We can believe Him when He says He is the only way. We *should* believe Him.

The Pope is massively, terrifyingly wrong. All religions do not lead to God. Jesus is the ONLY way.

1. <https://ethosinstitute.sg/every-religion-is-a-way-to-god/> Accessed 9/17/2024 ?

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/the-pope-got-it-wrong-breathhtakingly-wrong/ on September 17, 2024.

What You CAN Say to Someone Who's Grieving

When we [lost our \(believing\) son to suicide](#) last month, we received hundreds of cards and Facebook notes assuring us of people's care and sympathy. What a blessing!

So often, people just don't know what to say in the face of horrific loss and pain, and it's easy to say the wrong thing. One of my favorite-ever blog posts is "[What Not to Say When Someone is Grieving](#)."

But I want to share ideas on what has been truly comforting and supportive, because some of the comments we received are how "the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3) blessed us, and I hope you find them helpful for crafting what YOU can say to someone in pain.

Bottom line key: what really comforts and encourages us (because we're still making our way through grief) is communicating LOVE. Nothing encourages like the power of love. If you're really crunched for time, scroll to the end for the two most powerful notes we received.

Cards

I am sad and so sorry for all the pain you are experiencing. I'm praying for your peace in the midst of the anguish. With love for you and appreciation for your faithful witness.

May you both feel the hope that anchors our souls—even in dark days and weeks.

I am so sorry for the grave loss you are suffering. I am lifting you up in prayer and asking the Holy Spirit to intercede for you in this time when words are not enough. I ask God to make His nearness evident to you in the coming days

and that His peace would surround and carry you moment by moment. May the Lord bless you and keep you.

There are no words sufficient to convey my deep sympathy for you. Having said that, I know that Curt is now experiencing what those of us who remain can only look forward to—complete fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and all the saints who have gone before. You both remain in my heart and prayers.

Praying for an extra measure of God's presence and peace in the days ahead.

We love you and we feel your pain and wish we could bear some of it for you. We lift you up to our Father's grace!

We know that Curt is fully healed and rejoicing with Jesus over the indescribable gift of glory! Still, we cannot fully fathom the deep emotions you are going through. Just know you are and will be in our prayers.

Facebook notes

I will be in prayer asking the Lord to tenderly hold you both in His hands and ease your pain and your grief.

May the Holy Spirit minister to you and meet your needs in ways beyond we could even ask or imagine.

My heart is breaking for you. I'm so sorry. Love you all.

May the Lord be so near, may you cherish your wonderful memories with you son, and may the hope of heaven bring comfort in the deep pain of loss.

No words can adequately comfort—but I am so deeply sorry and I pray for sustaining comfort until the promised reunion.

I am heartbroken for your loss but so grateful for your hope that you will see Curt again.

Oh Sue, words fail. May the peace that passes understanding

come to you, Ray and the family quickly.

Words are inadequate in the midst of such tragedy. Love and prayers for you and your family.

Oh dear friends, we are crushed by this news but we know God's grace superimposes us in our most difficult moments. We are praying for you in this difficult time and know your future reunion with Curt will erase this present sorrow.

Oh, Sue! I am weeping with you. I am praying for you right now. May the Lord comfort you as only He can. One day, death will be forever defeated and all will be made new. Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

I am asking the Lord to help you feel His presence and strength in tangible ways and that the hope of heaven comforts you. Sending you so much love!

My heart grieves with you, Sue and Ray. May God's loving presence comfort and sustain you as He did for me four years ago when I received similar news about my son. I'm thankful we grieve but not without hope. My prayers are with you now and in the days to come and I send you my love.

We lost our son to suicide two years ago, so when I tell you my heart aches with you I know whereof I speak. I pray that the Lord sends you comfort. I pray that the Lord holds you in his loving arms. I pray He gives you whatever strength you need. I love you sweet sister in Christ.

—

Lord, we ask for Your comfort to envelop our beloved Bohlin family in their time of unimaginable sorrow. Please grant them strength to face each day and the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Surround them with love and support, and let them feel Your presence even in the darkest moments.

Help them to find solace in the memories of their son and to lean on one another as they navigate this painful journey. May they feel Your everlasting arms holding them close, providing hope and healing in the days to come.

In Your merciful name, we pray. Amen.

I wish I could give you a huge hug right now. My heart aches for you and Ray.

My heart breaks for you both. May you experience God's supernatural peace surpassing all understanding ... in such an un-understandable moment.

I have no words. Only tears.

Our hearts are breaking for you! God is faithful, yes but this is HARD.

Oh Sue & Ray, what words are there for this? May you be swamped with God's tender mercy. I pray that the structure you have built upon the firm foundation of Christ, day after day & year after year, now be a sanctuary for you. May many take note to see & know that Jesus is enough for unspeakable times.

Devastated & heartbroken for you all. He was such a sweet soul and he will forever have a piece of my heart. Grateful he is in the arms of Jesus and no longer in agony. Praying the Lord's peace washes over your pain.

Oh Sue. My heart is shattered on your behalf. May you be comforted by ways that only the Lord can offer. I love you SO MUCH. I am approaching His throne for you and your family.

I know God is so near and grieving along with you and Ray! I pray that you can submit all your steps and words to him and let him heal you the only way our amazing God can. I am sending so many hugs.

Oh Sue! I cannot imagine the depth of pain coupled with the hope of heaven. Lord, preserve my dear friends through their deep loss, sustain them with your mighty hand, extend peace and rest as they reflect on sweet memories. Hold them close Lord.

The Most Powerful Notes:

h how my heart hurts for you as you bear this great loss. You have been so faithful to love and care for your beloved son all these years. Now you can rest in knowing he is in the arms of Jesus now. May the God of all comfort carry you and sustain you in the difficult days to come, and may He fill you with joyous memories you can cherish in the midst of the grief. You are incredible parents and I'm sure that very few will understand the burden and sacrifice you have carried for so long. Rest now in peace knowing he is with Jesus and your loving work is complete

—

My eyes have been glued to this page for 30 minutes, unsure of how to start such a note,

I know words can fail at such a time, but loving prayer does its most urgent work. You both are loved by so many and I know that heaven's gates are flooded with the prayers of the body of Christ. My prayer tonight is that the God of all comfort would comfort your hurting hearts.

Please know that your tears are mingled with family and friends who love you so. I am thankful to be in that number.

With my note comes my love,

Loving and compassionate words can't *fix* grief, but they most certainly can bring comfort in the hard coldness of the pain of loss. I hope you find this helpful the next time you want

to say something that communicates your heart.

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/what-you-can-say-to-someone-whos-grieving/ on
Aug. 24, 2024.

Suicide Has Hit Our Family

Sue Bohlin shares her heart in the wake of her and her husband Ray's son taking his life.

Last week our beloved 44-year-old son Curt took his life.

He had struggled with severe suicidal depression for 26 years, hating almost every day of his adult life and wanting God to take him home to join his sister Rebecca. His depression and anxiety crippled him to the point of moving back in with my husband and me in 2008. He often shared with us his anguish at life in a fallen world, living in a broken body.

Curt eventually lost most of his hearing as the result of serving on the flight line in the Air Force, but when he was honorably discharged he was told it wasn't bad enough to warrant disability benefits. The loss of his hearing meant losing his touch with music, which he loved. It also meant losing touch with his community in online role-playing games, so he lost his sense of belonging and purpose.

His life was very painful. After staying his hand multiple times over two decades, God allowed him to take his life and instantly enter the heaven he had longed for, for so very long.

Some themes have been rolling around in my head since the news

of his passing.

First, our grief is mitigated by the relief on Curt's behalf that his suffering is over. When I told my husband the news delivered by a police detective, his first words were, "We've known this day might come for 26 years." We have lived with the darkness of his depression and anxiety for a long time, which included the ever-present threat of suicide because he always thought of it as his ticket out.

Second, God's grace is stronger than I have ever experienced in my entire life. It feels like He has tucked me in the shadow of His wing (Psalm 57:1). I have buried a child before; I know the brutality of grief, but God is holding it back. I winced to realize that a hard, heart-wrenching grief awaits me, but then I reminded myself that He will carry me through those days just as He's carrying me now. And I appreciated my friend who gave me "permission to not be okay" when those days come.

Third, the one attribute of God that comforts me more than any other is His sovereignty. A good and loving God is in control. He chose the day of Curt's birth, and He chose the day of his death. We've been clinging to Psalm 139:16, "All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be." Our son did not die a single day earlier than God had planned for him. And He prevented Curt from following through on all the times he planned to take his life since the first time when he was 17. God ordained for our daughter Rebecca to live for eight days, and He ordained for Curt to live for 44 years.

Fourth, God keeps pouring out His goodness on us every time we turn around. We have been inundated with people wanting to help us with everything we need from money for funeral expenses, to food and paper goods, to willing hands to prepare our home for family coming in for his memorial service. And that includes being willing to clean out his room and haul

away all the furniture that reeked of body odor. In case you don't know, severely depressed people usually don't care about personal hygiene, and both our son and his room stank from weeks, sometimes months, of going unwashed. It was a source of sorrow and frustration to us, but we loved him in his mental illness and just lived with it.

Fifth, there is the blessing of *not knowing* so many things. I don't know what he was thinking when something flipped and he went from offering to cook lunch for the family visiting us, to leaving our home intent on stepping off an overpass. I don't know what he was thinking or feeling on that walk. I don't know what his last seconds were like, and I am most grateful that we didn't have to identify him at the medical examiner's office. I don't know so many things, and I am so glad. I can leave all those questions in the Lord's hands, and I can ask him when I see him again-if it matters at all by then.

And that brings me to the most important idea that has marked these days: HOPE. Hope is future-facing faith. Not wishful thinking, like "I hope it doesn't rain on my picnic." Biblical hope is certainty. Hebrews 6:19 calls biblical hope "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." God has used this horrible time to reveal that He has been working in the background to strengthen my future-facing faith. When I say I have hope to be reunited with my son, it's not a wish. I am 1000% certain that he is in heaven and that my husband and I, our other son Kevin, and his wife Lauren will join him there.

I had the privilege of leading Curt to put his trust in Jesus Christ when he was three years old, watching him grow in his faith over the years, watching him bear the spiritual fruit that proved his faith was real. I know he's in heaven, because to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Our dear friend Dave commented on my Facebook post, "I am heartbroken for your loss but so grateful for your hope that you will see Curt again." That's when I had

the lightbulb moment and I replied, "Thanks for using the word HOPE. Future-facing faith. My hope about seeing Curt is as strong as my view of Ray this very minute. Who is sitting three feet from me."

Curt's first week in heaven: it felt like he was just on the other side of the invisible wall separating earth from heaven. Maybe it's the special bond between a mother and the child she bore, maybe it's something spiritual, I don't know. But the reality of my son's new home makes heaven closer to me than it has ever been. My husband Ray has said for years that heaven is more real to me than anyone he knows. Part of it is knowing our baby Rebecca is there, part of it is longing for my new body untouched by polio and cancer.

Curt's suicide is not okay. Murder is sin, even the murder of oneself. But Jesus' statement on the cross, "It is finished," meaning "It is paid in full," covered every one of his sins, including taking the life God gave him. With God's begrudging permission, apparently. I trust the Lord with it all.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/suicide-has-hit-our-family on July 16, 2024.

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.