

# “What’s My Purpose in Life?”

A dear younger friend of mine recently posted this question on a forum:

“Do you feel that you have a great mission or purpose in life?”

“I do feel like I’m made for something more than this, but whatever it is I can’t reach it, or find out what it is. I do feel as though I have a great purpose or mission in life—I’m sure I do!!! Why can I just not figure it out?”

“Was I born in the wrong time? My roommate says that I’m like a young person who thinks they were meant for more. She says hardly anyone here has a great life of purpose and I just have to accept reality. 99% of the people are just normal people—that there are not that many characters, priests, prophets, or heroes.”

“Does everyone go through life never figuring out what their great purpose is? There has to be a purpose beyond just surviving. Roommate says that my problem is that I think I’m born to be a superstar, a saint or a hero. She thinks I’m just unrealistic, and what I expect from and of myself is unrealistic. I think she’s a pessimist. I want to do something big. I don’t want a mediocre life.”

Similar to [C.S. Lewis’ argument](#) that our longings correspond to God’s plan for the fulfillment of those longings (such as experiencing hunger because food exists for us to eat, and experiencing fatigue because there is such a thing as sleep), I think my friend’s longing for the something bigger and something more, her disdain for a mediocre life, is indeed shaped by God’s call to love and serve Him in large and glorious ways. But we may have been waylaid by the “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” gospel, since many 20th-century Westerners seem to have directed their focus to

finding out this wonderful plan rather than on God Himself.

I don't see anywhere in scripture where we are called to find our purpose in life. I think God just wants us to obey what He's already given us. When we do a search for the phrases "God's will" or "will of God" in the Bible, we know for sure God wants us to do things like give thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18), be sanctified and avoid sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3), silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good (1 Peter 2:15), and sometimes, suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong (1 Peter 3:17).

All the "one anothers" in the Bible are commands, so those are God's will as well. So our purpose in life is to please Him through obedience, which should grow out of our awareness that He loves us and made us for Himself.

Because we are made in the image of God, our purpose in life is to put Him on display. We—our bodies, our minds, our humor, our gifts and talents—are a display case for the glory of God. I think the specifics of how we go about that don't matter as much as we seem to think they do. Desiring to be truthful and transparent in serving as display cases for the treasure within matters more, I believe.

According to John 15, it is the Lord's pleasure—and thus His purpose for us—that we bear *much* (as opposed to *some* or *more*) fruit in us. That means Christlikeness; that means the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). So whether we are engaged in paid work or evangelizing on street corners, changing diapers or driving in traffic, putting Jesus on display is the most important thing. To do that, we need to continually immerse ourselves in His presence and His word, and hang around His people who are also immersing themselves in His presence and His word.

Right along with spiritual fruit is the topic of [spiritual gifts](#). Finding God's personal purpose for us will involve discovering which of the spiritual gifts He has given each one of us, and using them to build up the body of Christ and bless others. (They are found in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4.)

And finally, 2 Corinthians 2 offers a delightful word picture of Christ-followers serving as "a sweet aroma of Christ to God" the Father, as well as bringing the fragrance of knowing Christ to people who are either being saved or perishing. That, too, is part of our purpose in life. I think that if we focus on what God has already told us pleases Him, obeying the commands He has already given His children, we'll get to the point of looking in the rear-view mirror of life and discovering, "Oh, *that* was my personal purpose! Cool!"

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## Permission Givers

Recently I was shopping in a store clogged with shoppers seeking Grand Opening bargains. I wanted three of an item; as one of the stockers opened a box for me, another lady said, "The limit is six, right? Give me six!" Suddenly I wanted to have six as well. She had given me permission to buy more than I intended. It was like she whipped out a permission slip and handed it to me. And I took it. This lady had no idea what she did!

We often function as "permission givers" in each other's

lives. It's part of living in community. We give each other permission not just for things we do, but how we think. And that's why we need to be careful what we're giving permission for. That was Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 10 when he warned the believers that they could end up giving permission to eat meat that had been offered to idols, which was sold at cut-rate prices in the meat market, to other believers for whom it would be sin because of their weak consciences.

We can give permission for evil as well as for good.

*Right now, the top three best-selling books are the Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy, which is female erotica. Verbal porn. Many people are enthusiastically hitting the LIKE button on Facebook whenever anyone mentions it, each one giving permission to others to read it. In Dannah Gresh's blog ["I'm Not Reading Fifty Shades of Grey,"](#) she mentions a friend who "regretfully can't get the images out of her head." (And that's why I'm not reading it either.)*

We can give permission for others to endorse what the Bible calls sin by reassuring each other that we've outgrown the ancient, outmoded values that were given for our protection. We can give permission to continue building an addiction to sexual sin like using pornography by reassuring each other that "everybody does it." And it starts early; my friend has been intentional about teaching her 11-year-old son to choose purity, warning him that others will want to show him dirty pictures. Sure enough, last month in the bathroom of a boy scout camp, another 11-year-old offered to show him his porn collection on his cell phone.

But let's talk about giving permission for *good!* That's where this social dynamic can really shine!

For over a decade, I have participated in an online support forum, and I did a search for my posts using the word "permission."

- “I wish someone had asked me when I was growing up what it was like to be handicapped, to be stared at, to be different. It would have given me permission to find and use my voice, instead of living in bondage to shame that wasn’t mine.”

- After people responded to a post that I also shared here, [“What Would You Say to Your 8-Year-Old Self?”](#), I affirmed posters for the really powerful truths they would want to say to their younger selves. “Now—will you give that same little self permission to receive that truth? And ask the Holy Spirit to seal it to your heart?”

- One of the young women I mentor gave herself permission to agree that there *would* be a last time for destructive behaviors that she repeatedly fell into: sinful relationships, indulging in drugs, and self-injury. That permission-giving opened the door to believing that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead was available to her for living in sobriety.

- A number of us encouraged a young lady terrified of doctor visits, who confessed her irrational fear of the crinkly paper on the exam table. I uploaded a “permission button” and wrote, “I give you permission to sit in a chair in the exam room till the very last second.” It was amazing how comforting that was!



Permission

- “Denying pain doesn’t make it go away, just harder to access because you try to bury it. Give yourself permission to feel pain. You don’t have to do it by yourself—invite Jesus into it, grab a hold of His hand, and hang on for dear life.”

- “You have permission to break a promise you never should have made in the first place, what has been called ‘foolish vows.’ For example, when you promise you will never leave or abandon a friend where the relationship has turned unhealthy and sinful.”

- “Please give yourself permission to think of [a certain

person] as an illegal, immoral, harmful substance like crack cocaine that you just cannot have even a tiny bit of, because there's no such thing as a tiny bit of a life-controlling, life-dominating, life-destroying substance." "The Holy Spirit knows every single thing we need to let go of [in forgiveness]. Each memory is like a splinter He wants permission to remove. But you have to cooperate with the process, thus the need to give Him permission."

- "Give yourself permission to mentally fire your sister as the supposedly 'older and wiser' sister. She may be older, but she's not wiser, and you don't have to follow her advice when it is not wise because it's informed by the world, not by God."

- And finally, "Give yourself permission to become comfortable with new habits you'd like to form, such as stopping in the middle of the conversation to pray. And praying out loud. And using new expressions like 'The Lord bless you!' And even something as prosaic as wearing a wrap instead of a sweater, or wearing a hat. Give yourself permission to step outside your comfort zone and practice this new thing you want to become comfortable with, and tell yourself, 'It's OK to not be comfortable with this yet. I'll get there eventually.'"

What have you given—or received—permission for?

This blog post originally appeared at  
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2, 2012

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# The Stink of Self-Pity

When I got polio as an infant in 1953, just before the vaccine was developed, my parents were instructed by the doctors and the therapists that the very worst thing that could happen was for me to wallow in self-pity, and to never let me go there. Maybe they all thought that if no one ever talked about the huge assault of this life-changing trauma, it would never occur to me to think about it, and so I'd never end up in the Self-Pity Mudpuddle. So what was modeled to me, and which I dutifully followed, was a constant response of denial.

So I grew up wondering, but never able to put into words, why it was that no one seemed to understand how really, really rotten it was that I have to live my entire life with a disability, with restrictions, with growing weakness and fatigue and pain.

Fast forward to a recent mini-vacation in Cozumel with my sister and her husband. I have a lightweight travel scooter that enables me to zip around, covering distances too great for me to walk, even with my cane. Well, one night we left the scooter outside our bungalow door while we charged the battery inside, but during the night there was a torrential downpour. Scooters and rain, I learned, are mortal enemies. It was dead. I called the front desk to ask for a golf cart to come get me to take me to the resort restaurant for breakfast, but no one came and it was too far to walk.

At one point, my husband Ray lovingly said, "You know you can't go into town without your scooter, and there are no wheelchairs here." (He knows me well; well-trained in denial from toddlerhood, it's easy for me to say, "Oh, it'll be fine"—and then later I am in excruciating pain after walking. He needs to speak the truth in love to me so I don't overdo things.)

Hit with the realization that I couldn't walk to breakfast, much less be able to go shopping with my sister, something I'd looked forward to for MONTHS, I was confronted again with the loss of mobility and the loss of independence that a scooter provides.

So I sat there, choosing to stay present in the feelings that overwhelmed me, paying attention to what I was feeling: Sadness. Grief. Loss.

Tears.

I invited Jesus into my feelings and looked to Him to help me process them well.

And then I wondered, *Am I feeling self-pity too?*

You know, the worst of all sins for polio survivors?

That's when the lightbulb came on. I realized that self-pity isn't a primary feeling like sadness, grief and loss. Self-pity is a secondary event, a choice to respond to legitimate negative feelings. But it's not the only choice. I could also choose to respond with trust that God knows my pain, He sees and understands, and I can trust Him to redeem every scrap of my pain and my grief—for His glory and my good.

I suddenly saw self-pity as analogous to the stink of body odor. When we're hot or we exercise, our bodies are designed to release excess heat through sweat, which doesn't smell. It's natural—it's God's gift to us. But if we let the sweat linger without showering, if we don't process it by bathing, bacteria multiply and excrete what DOES stink.

To draw the analogy out further, experiencing grief and sadness is natural and not sinful at all. There's no stink to those legitimate feelings that come from life in a fallen world. But when we don't bring our feelings to the Lord, allowing Him to cleanse and purify them as we trust that He is



good and He loves us even when we hurt, they can disintegrate and start to stink.

So I sat there, for the first time seeing the line between sadness and self-pity. Sadness happens because of the effects of sin in a fallen world; Jesus was “a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). But self-pity springs from the wrong belief that “I don’t deserve this. Life should treat me better than this. Garbage always happens to ME while good things happen to others”. . . *ad nauseum*.

I think we can avoid self-pity by seeking to respond with truth: “I deserve nothing but hell. Life in a fallen world is just painful, and this is my share today. Bad things happen to everyone, and good things happen to everyone, and the difference is the willingness to look for and see them. God is still good even though He has allowed pain into my life, and I can trust Him that there is a purpose for my pain.”

By the way, we had to replace the dead scooter, but in His goodness, the Lord prompted some dear friends to pay for it as a gift. Now *that* feeling was on the opposite end of the spectrum from self-pity!

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## Just Say the Magic Words

*June 11, 2012*

One of my friends is doing the hard work of facing the

devastating effects of childhood abuse and various unspeakable horrors. She knows that she needs to accept the full impact what happened to her in order to grieve it and forgive the people who wounded her so she can walk in freedom. But one of her friends recently gave her some disheartening counsel: “Oh, there’s a spirit of grief harassing you. You don’t need to go around digging up the past like you’re doing. Just speak your inner healing into existence! Declare that you are healed and whole in Jesus’ name!”

This lady has bought into the dangerous (and unbiblical) “word of faith” theology (WOF) that puts faith in one’s words instead of in God Himself. It’s a religious version of “wishing will make it so,” having morphed into “speaking will make it so.” This wrong thinking can range from an unfortunate misunderstanding of the Scriptures to a blasphemous presumption that creatures can create reality by the power of their words—just like God did when He spoke creation into existence by the power of His word.

It’s certainly an appealing idea, bypassing the hard soul work of [grieving and forgiving](#) to get to the prize of a healed heart at peace. Just say the magic words, like waving a magic wand, and POOF! you’re healed! Who wouldn’t want to go that far, far easier route?

Shortcuts don’t work. They do, however, result in major disappointment when people are taught [unrealistic expectations](#) of God about promises He never made. One of the most basic principles of Bible reading and study is that “context is king.” We must never wrench verses out of their surrounding paragraphs, chapters, and books. And if we come up with an understanding or application of a verse that is contradicted by other passages in scripture, we need to jettison our wrong thinking.

So, for example, if someone points out Isaiah 53:5 to my friend, which says “by His stripes we are healed,” and

promises she can claim healing of any and every pain or ailment, what happens when nothing happens? This wrong-headed promise tempts people to conclude that God is not good, and He is not faithful, because He didn't keep His word. But that cannot be the meaning of Isaiah 53:5 since the supposed promise of immediate healing is contradicted in other scriptures such as 2 Cor. 12:7-9, where Paul tells us that God said no to his pleas for healing from his thorn in the flesh, promising instead that His grace was enough. Claiming inner healing without submitting to the process of facing the full impact of what happened to her so that she can release it to the Lord not only isn't truthful, it doesn't work like that.

WOF taps into legitimate longings for a life free from want, from sickness and death, from pain, which are promised to believers in Christ in the new heavens and new earth. But it illegitimately promises that life NOW. It's simply a matter of praying in faith, believing *not* in God's goodness, but the power of one's own prayers. Our own words. That's a form of idolatry.

But this theology is not consistent with reality, which means it cannot be of God. One night I was at an event where there would be a drawing for some jewelry. I watched several people lay hands on the blingy stuff and say, "I claim this in Jesus' name." Guess what—none of them won the drawing. What happened? It's the same dynamic as when believers on both sides of a football game claim victory for their team in Jesus' name. God cannot grant two opposite requests—or, in this case, demands. (He's not much into demands of any kind, actually.)

God deals with truth, not fantasy and illusion. WOF violates the scriptural principle of embracing truth, such as the psalmist's powerful statement in Ps. 51:6, "You desire truth in the innermost being." Another friend, Cathy, was dying of cancer, but she refused to believe what the doctors said. She insisted right up to her last breath that she was believing health for herself, and would not talk to anyone about funeral

arrangements or even what to do with her house and her possessions because that would be faithless. But she wasn't putting her faith in God, who was actually calling her home, but in her wishful prayers.

Beware of spiritual shortcuts, especially those that are created by your own words. If there were such a thing, don't you think Jesus would have bypassed the Cross?

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/just\\_say\\_the\\_magic\\_words](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/just_say_the_magic_words)

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## Responding To President Obama's Same-Sex Approval

President Obama recently gave public support to gay marriage. How do we respond from within a biblical worldview?

Some Christians have used this news event to highlight the way the church is blowing it on the opportunity to be "Jesus with skin on" to the GLBT (gay | lesbian | bi-sexual | transgender) community. This sentiment is especially prominent among people under forty who often have good friends who identify as gay.

There are two different issues that need to be kept separate: how the church treats gay-identifying *people*, and the church's position on the culture-affecting issue of gay identity and so-called gay marriage. The first provides an opportunity to display a welcoming attitude of grace, which says, "We're glad you're here like the rest of us messed-up sinners who desperately need Jesus. He loves you and accepts you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay that

way. Come embrace holiness with us as we learn it together.” (And this message is just as true for drug and porn addicts, as well as Pharisaical holier-than-thou folks addicted to judgmental moralism.)

The other is about refusing to budge on what God has said about sexual sin, which does not change. Homosexuality is no more right, holy or acceptable today than it ever was in Bible times. Neither is heterosexual fornication, adultery, or pornography-driven lust. It’s not just that sex outside of God’s plan for marriage (which is limited to one man and one woman, per the created intent in Genesis 1 and 2) breaks His law—His rules are given as a gift to keep us from breaking our hearts.

Jesus said He came to bring a sword (Matt. 10:34), and this issue is one of the areas of conflict He was bound to cause because His standard of holiness, and His call to live in it, is at odds with the human desire to do what we want regardless of what God thinks. Is homosexuality a sin? This is a simple question, but it needs a complex answer. Same-sex attraction (SSA) is usually not a choice; it’s something people discover, usually with pain and horror. (Females, naturally more relational, can cultivate it and be emotionally seduced toward lesbianism, though, even with no previous leanings that way.)

But does it “fall short of the glory of God,” one way Scripture defines sin (Rom 3:23)?

Certainly.

Same-sex attractions are a corruption of God’s intention for healthy personal and sexual development, the result of the Fall and of living in a fallen world. I get this. I have lived with polio ever since I was six months old. I didn’t choose this disability, but is it a sin? It certainly falls short of the glory of God, and polio is part of living in a fallen world. It’s one of the ways I experience the infection of sin.

I did not choose the fallen-creation consequence of polio, yet I have to deal with it. My *responses* to it can be sinful, just as those who experience unwanted SSA have to deal with the fallen-creation consequence of homosexuality, but their responses to it can be sinful.

(By the way, there is no evidence of a genetic cause for homosexuality. The “born that way” myth cannot be supported biologically. But there are good reasons that many people end up with same-sex feelings; for more information, please read my articles in the [homosexuality section](#) of the Probe website, as well as articles on the Living Hope Ministries website at [www.livehope.org](http://www.livehope.org).)

When people give in to the temptations of SSA and engage sexually with other men or other women, God’s word has a very serious word for it: *abomination* (Lev. 18:22). But it’s important to understand that the abomination is the act, not the people.

President Obama referred to the golden rule (treat others as you want them to treat you) as his rationale for supporting gay marriage:

*[Michelle and I] are both practicing Christians and obviously this position may be considered to put us at odds with the views of others but, you know, when we think about our faith, the thing at root that we think about is, not only Christ sacrificing himself on our behalf, but it’s also the Golden Rule, you know, treat others the way you would want to be treated. And I think that’s what we try to impart to our kids and that’s what motivates me as president and I figure the most consistent I can be in being true to those precepts, the better I’ll be as a as a dad and a husband and, hopefully, the better I’ll be as president. {1}*

In 2008, in defending his current position against same-sex marriage but for civil unions, he said concerning people who

might find his position controversial, “I would just refer them to the Sermon on the Mount, which I think is, in my mind, for my faith, more central than an obscure passage in Romans.”  
{2}

Two things strike me about this. First, he’s not consistent about his application of the golden rule; he’s pro-abortion-but of course he doesn’t want to be hacked to pieces without anesthesia, which is precisely what certain abortion procedures entail.

Second, choosing the golden rule over “an obscure passage in Romans” shows he doesn’t understand that “the entirety of [God’s] word is truth” (Ps. 119:160). Both the Golden Rule and the Romans 1 passage are true; it’s not a choice between the two. Since he used to give lectures on Constitutional law at the University of Chicago, I doubt that he would ever use the term “an obscure phrase in the Constitution,” because obscurity is about one’s perception of importance, not the actual importance of a matter. To a Constitutional lawyer who respects the document, every phrase of the document is important. To a serious [true] Christ-follower, every word of His scriptures is important.

The issue of same-sex marriage isn’t about people’s right to live in committed relationships, to do life together. It’s about demanding society’s approval for “[the façade of normalcy](#).” It’s about demanding approval for what God has called an abomination (the sexual act, not the people engaged in it).

Ryan Anderson wrote in the *National Review Online*,

*“What’s at issue is whether the government will recognize such unions as marriages – and then force every citizen and business to do so as well. This isn’t the legalization of something, this is the coercion and compulsion of others to recognize and affirm same-sex unions as marriages.”*{3}

American culture is definitely moving toward normalizing homosexuality, but from God's perspective it will never be normal or natural (Rom. 1:26-27). And it's God's perspective that matters.

## Notes

1.

[www.dennyburk.com/president-obamas-scriptural-defense-of-gay-marriage/](http://www.dennyburk.com/president-obamas-scriptural-defense-of-gay-marriage/)

2. [www.wnd.com/2008/03/57975/](http://www.wnd.com/2008/03/57975/)

3. [bit.ly/LGZ1z1](http://bit.ly/LGZ1z1)

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# The Keys to Emotional Healing – Part 2

In [part 1](#), I talked about grieving as a necessary part of emotional healing. The other part is forgiving, separating ourselves emotionally and spiritually from the offense so that we can continue to be healthy toward the offender. As I said last time, forgiving is like pulling out the soul-splinter that is causing pain and the emotional “pus” that accumulates from unresolved pain and anger. (Grieving discharges this emotional pus.) Forgiving releases the person who hurt us into the Lord's care, for *Him* to deal with.

We see this modeled by the Lord Jesus during the crucifixion process, when He repeated over and over, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). With each fresh offense, He released the offender into His Father's hands, refusing to succumb to the sin of unforgiveness.



Let's say you do something to hurt me. It's like tossing a potato at me. I catch the potato and discover it's a *hot* potato. I could continue to clutch the potato to my chest, screaming in pain and yelling at how much it hurts and how awful you are to do this to me, going on and on, "IT HURTS! IT HURTS! OHHH THIS IS HORRIBLE, TERRIBLE, AWFUL PAIN! HOW DARE YOU DO THIS TO MEEEEEE!"

Or I could let go and let it drop to the floor.

There is relief in release, to be sure, but the problem with merely letting go is that we can pick it back up again. Biblical forgiveness means "sending away," with the Old Testament image of a scapegoat to help us understand. Once a year, the priest would place his hands on the head of a goat, symbolically transferring the sins of the entire nation to the goat, send it away into the wilderness, then release it. (Lev. 16:7-10)

We do need to let go of the offense and the offender, but the real power in forgiveness is *sending it away* to Jesus for Him to deal with.

If someone tosses a metaphorical hot potato at us, instead of simply letting it drop to the floor where we could pick it up again, we need to imagine Jesus standing there with His hands outstretched, inviting us to give our "hot potato" to Him. He has asbestos hands!

Forgiveness means we acknowledge the offense against us, and then transfer the offender over to God in our hearts. But for forgiveness to be real and true, we need to face the impact of the other person's sin or hurt against us and *grieve* it before we can truly let go of it and send it away to Jesus. Otherwise, it's like going to the emergency room with a broken bone and telling the doctor, "I want you to fix my bone from the other side of the room without touching me."

In the real world, if I continued to clutch a hot potato to

myself, it would cool down and no longer cause pain. But in the emotional realm, if we continue to clutch an offense to our hearts, it hardens into something like cement, and a wall is built between the offender and us. And between us and God. And between us and everyone else. Unforgiveness is spiritually and emotionally dangerous. One of my family members hung on to every offense of her entire life, real or perceived, and never let go. With every year she became more and more bitter, cold and hard-quite unlovely and unlovable, apart from the power of God. She died with a heart so diminished and shriveled that her death was nothing but a relief for the rest of us.

When we forgive the ones who hurt us, we send their offense to Jesus, who already paid the penalty for their sins and woundings against us. The best exercise I've ever encountered to help people forgive is called "the Jesus Jail," which you can find [here](#) courtesy of my friend Chuck Lynch, author of the book *I Should Forgive, But. . .*

Grieving and forgiving: the two powerful components of emotional healing. May you experience the grace of God in tearing down emotional strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4) to walk in the freedom of healing.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/the\\_keys\\_to\\_emotional\\_healing\\_-\\_part\\_2](http://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_keys_to_emotional_healing_-_part_2) on April 24, 2012.

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## **Redeeming The Hunger Games:**

# From a Christian Worldview Perspective

*Although not explicitly anti-Christian, The Hunger Games presents a very disturbing future world where children are forced to fight one another to the death. Sue Bohlin presents solid, biblically based concepts on how we are to consider movies in general and redeeming questions we should ask of this movie if one chooses to see it. Viewing movies with the intent of understanding the worldview behind the movie can help us present our Christian worldview in a way that communicates with the people around us.*

Should Christians read (or see) *The Hunger Games*? Some people make strong arguments for avoiding any contact with the books or movie. No one will lie on their deathbed and say, "Oh, how I regret missing *Hunger Games*." But this is the latest "big thing" to hit our culture; is there a way for Christ-followers to redeem it and not simply consume it as entertainment?

This separatist (and unrealistic) position confirms an unhealthy false dichotomy between "things of the world" and "things of the spirit realm." We need to see the world as one reality where Christ rules over all and has something to say about everything. It would be better to ask, "How does the Bible relate to *Hunger Games*?" It would be better to compare biblical truths and biblical values to any body of work people are reading or viewing or listening to, the way that we can better judge the crookedness of a stick by laying it next to a straightedge.

Developing our critical thinking skills protects us from absorbing and internalizing ungodly ideas, creating yet more "cultural captives" who are more conformed to the surrounding

cultures than the Word and character of God.

## **“It’s just a story. . .”**

Many people dismiss concern over blockbuster novels and movies by saying, “Come on, it’s just a story, it’s *fiction!*” But we need to be *more* careful about how we process ideas and images that come through story, since most people’s defenses are down with this genre, and they just absorb the story without thinking or analyzing. That’s a major contributing factor to cultural captivity in the church—people have been absorbing the ideas and values of the culture through music, TV, movies, books, and even just personal conversation, without comparing them to what God says.

When people take in and digest *Hunger Games* as mere entertainment, their unthinking discernment puts them in the same category as the Capitol spectators who have no concept of the atrocity of human beings being sacrificed for their diversion. But if you are deeply troubled by its depiction of the broken reality of life in a fallen world, if you are able to think about the implications of the story, then you are interacting with the books and movie with wisdom.

I think the best way to build wisdom and develop critical thinking is by asking questions that help us evaluate what we read or see.

For example, something is terribly wrong in the world that author Suzanne Collins paints in *Hunger Games*. Our souls rebel against the evil, the sense of “not right-ness” in it. We need to ask ourselves (and others), *What is the “terribly wrong”?* *And where did that sense of right and wrong come from?* I suggest that the visceral reaction comes from the imprint of God, the *imago Dei*, on our souls. The rightness of the image of God on our souls contrasts painfully with the crookedness of the dystopian world of *Hunger Games*.

The presence of evil and sin in the books is not bad in and of itself; as in the Bible, they are never glorified or promoted. The result is that most readers/viewers react along moral lines: murder and betrayal are bad, sacrifice and loyalty are good. This is a legitimate and edifying use of literature and film.

## Questions to Ask

My colleague Todd Kappelman, an accomplished literature and film critic, suggests several thoughtful questions to ask about films and books:

- *How important is life to the director/writers etc.? Are the tough issues dealt with or avoided?*
- *Is there a discernible philosophical position in the film? If so, what is it, and can a case be made for your interpretation?*
- *Is the subject matter of the film portrayed truthfully? Here the goal is to determine if the subject matter is being dealt with in a way that is in agreement with or contrary to the experiences of daily reality.*
- *Is there a discernible hostility toward particular values and beliefs? Does the film seek to be offensive for the sake of sensationalism alone?*
- *Is the film technically well made, written, produced and acted?*[{1}](#)

Christian thinker Leland Ryken proposes three more questions that the Christian ask when interpreting a work of art:

- *Does the interpretation of reality in this work conform or fail to conform to Christian doctrine or ethics? (The answer may be mixed for a given work.)*

- *If some of the ideas and values are Christian, are they inclusively or exclusively Christian? That is, do these ideas encompass Christianity and other religions or philosophic viewpoints, or do they exclude Christianity from other viewpoints?*
- *If some of the ideas and values in a work are Christian, are they a relatively complete version of the Christian view, or are they a relatively rudimentary version of Christian belief on a given topic?*[{2}](#)

Our good friend Dan Panetti from Prestonwood Christian Academy has assembled a deeply insightful white paper for parents to use in talking about *Hunger Games* with their children, to help them build a biblical worldview analysis of something students are intent on reading or seeing anyway. (And it's not just older students, either. One of my friends' eight-year-old son insisted on going to see the movie. His mother told me, "He was attracted by the movie trailers and he knew people reading the book. He was enticed by the action, but kids killing kids did bother him [but not that much].")

I am grateful for Dan's generosity in allowing us to share his questions in this article, and to make his entire PDF document available for you on our website [here](#). Below are three of the nine major themes he highlights for discussion. I invite you to read through his paper to sharpen your own critical thinking skills!

And that's how we redeem *The Hunger Games*.

## **The Hunger Games Trilogy Parent Book Discussion**

by Dan Panetti, Prestonwood Christian Academy – Plano, Texas

**Substitutionary Atonement**

The most important theme of this book, in my opinion, is the concept of substitutionary atonement (or penal substitution).

*God made him who had no sin to be sin [or be a sin offering] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. – 2 Corinthians 5:21*

Katniss voluntarily takes the place of her sister Primrose as the “tribute” from District 12—essentially Katniss took the place of Primrose replacing her sister’s life with her own. Compare this story to the story of the sacrifice of Jesus in our place. While Katniss is willing to give her own life to protect her younger sister, Jesus was willing to give His life as a ransom for ours...while we were yet sinners—still IN rebellion against His Father! While Prim was young, “innocent” and weak and Katniss was far more skilled and able to defend herself; it was Jesus who was perfect and sinless dying for us!

## **Violence**

The primary complaint aired about *The Hunger Games* (both the books and the movie) related primarily to the violence; and, yes, the books and movie do have a violent theme and depictions. The first question is whether the violence is appropriate or simply gruesome for effect. Both Collins (the author) and those responsible for the movie do a remarkable job of actually restraining the emphasis on the violence. This does not mean that the books and movie are appropriate for all ages—quite to the contrary. But in discussing this concept with your own children you can point out the fact that there are times in human history when people have had to stand up and fight for what they believe in. Engraved into the wall of the Korean War Veterans Memorial is the statement, “Freedom is not free.” Katniss lives under an oppressive government and is forced to fight not only to protect herself and those she loves, but in the second and third book she fights for an ideal of something that is greater than just herself. Later we

will discuss the ideals of the Founding Fathers of our nation and their decision to throw off an oppressive government agreeing to pledge their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. Unlike previous generations, this generation is not as familiar with the cost of freedom born by those who give their lives in service to our nation. *The Hunger Games* reminds us that there are some things that are worth fighting for—and even dying for – meaning there will be a certain level of violence along the way.

*Freedom is a fragile thing and is never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people. Those who have known freedom, and then lost it, have never known it again. ~ Ronald Reagan*

## **Ethical Dilemmas**

One of the most fascinating aspects of *The Hunger Games* is the presentation of numerous ethical dilemmas – questions where you could ask yourself, “What would I do if I were in that situation?”

Examples of ethical dilemmas for conversation purposes:

Is lying wrong? Is lying always wrong? Would you be willing to lie to protect the life of another person? Would you be willing to lie to save your own life?

Obviously Katniss finds herself faced with these fascinating ethical dilemmas and she has choices to make. Whether she is inside the arena fighting for her life or leading a rebellion against President Snow and the oppressive government, Katniss is often faced with the choice of either having to lie or someone (including herself) having to pay the ultimate price of their lives!



Is killing wrong? Is killing another person always wrong? Would you be able to kill another person to save the life of someone you loved? Would you be able to take the life of another person to save your own life?

Again Katniss finds herself faced with these difficult situations. At the end of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss and Peeta decide that they would rather die than kill one another—and although Katniss hopes that those in control would rather have two victors than none, the reality is that both Katniss and Peeta take the poisonous berries with the intent of killing themselves.

Katniss struggles with this dilemma when she makes an alliance with Rue and when she remembers that Thresh let her live when he could have killed her. Why is it so difficult for Katniss to take the life of another while others in the arena appear to be so cavalier and nonchalant about it?

If you want to discuss more about ethical dilemmas, I suggest you read *The Hiding Place* by Corrie tem Boom. Corrie and her family were Dutch Christians who helped hide numerous Jews during WWII. Eventually Corrie and her family were arrested and sent away to concentration camps – her father and sister both died in a concentration camp.

As Christians we should look to God's Word for guidance in making decisions about life. Psalm 119:105 reminds us that God's Word "is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path." Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Wise counsel is also strongly encouraged in Scripture. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."

## Notes

1. [www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Movies/Movies2.htm](http://www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Movies/Movies2.htm)

2. [www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Movies/Movies3.htm](http://www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Movies/Movies3.htm)

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**See Also:**

[The Hunger Games: A hunger, a game or a calculated viewing option for Christians?](#)

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# The Keys to Emotional Healing – Part 1

After seeing God bring about major transformation of emotional healing in a number of broken people, I asked Him what was happening when He healed people's hearts. I wanted to understand the process. His answer was simple and profound, but never easy: "grieving and forgiving."

Both of these emotional disciplines are necessary to move from the place of sustaining a wound to the soul, to the place where that wound no longer controls and diminishes us—because it has been transformed into a healed scar.

Grieving means moving pain and anger from the inside to the outside. Tears are God's lubricant for that process, and what a gift of grace tears are. They are a physical manifestation of emotional pain, and when we weep—whether silent tears rolling down our cheeks or huge wracking sobs that exhaust us—the pain leaves our soul as it leaves the body.

One of my friends was so deeply wounded as a child by various

kinds of abuse that in order to survive, her personality splintered into several "alters." (Multiple personality disorder is now called DID, Dissociative Identity Disorder.) One day in therapy, as she cried while talking about the pain inside, she reached for the box of tissues to blot the tears. Abruptly, she "switched" to another alter who said to the therapist, "Don't let her use the Kleenex. We need to feel the tears rolling down her cheeks. That's what healing feels like." When she told me this, it resonated deeply with me as true, and I started paying attention to how the feeling of tears on my face nourishes my soul, regardless of the reason for them. (Specks of dust under my contacts notwithstanding!)

In many cases, grieving also requires getting angry. Anger as a response to a violation of our dignity as people made in God's image, to shaming or disrespect, to neglect or abuse, is a healthy reaction. It says, "You treated me as worthless when I have great value as God's beloved child. You dishonored me AND you dishonored God." We can express anger in constructive and destructive ways, and of course it's always better to choose a constructive expression! We see the Lord Jesus constructively channeling His anger as He fashioned a whip before cleansing the temple (John 2:15). Some people have punched pillows, or hammered nails into pieces of wood, or torn down something slated for demolition. Others have screamed out their anger and grief in a safe place. Punching bags are a helpful place to discharge anger. And one of the most powerful ways to release anger is to create a list of all the ways someone has hurt us, and the impact of their choices and actions on us, and then talk to that person in an empty chair. We say—or yell or scream—the things we would want to say if we could duct-tape the person into the chair so they couldn't leave, if they *had* to listen to us. And we go down the list, one item at a time, telling them everything they need to know about what they did and how it affected us. Often it's unwise, if not impossible, to actually dump all that anger on the actual person, but it's amazingly healing to

speak out the pain and anger with our words. Out loud. Emphasis on LOUD, if need be!

Once we have grieved the hurt, the next step is letting go: forgiving. Forgiving is like pulling out the soul-splinter that is causing pain and the emotional “pus” that accumulates from unresolved pain and anger. (Grieving discharges this emotional pus.) Forgiving releases the person who hurt us into the Lord’s care, for *Him* to deal with.

I’ll explain more about forgiving in my next blog post, [The Keys to Emotional Healing – Part 2](#).

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/the\\_keys\\_to\\_emotional\\_healing\\_part\\_1](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_keys_to_emotional_healing_part_1) on April 16, 2012.

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## Giving Thanks in a Hard Place

My husband and I are ministering in part of the former Soviet Union while I’ve been reading Ann Voskamp’s book *One Thousand Gifts*. She focuses on seeing and living life through the filter of *eucharisteo*, the Greek word for “giving thanks.” The title refers to the fact that she recorded a thousand little ways in which God revealed Himself and His goodness to her, most of which were a pleasure to receive, some of which were painful. She worked to practice gratitude, which not only built her faith but also made her aware of how deeply she was loved.

This is a physically and spiritually challenging place to be, so I’ve had many opportunities to practice *eucharisteo* here. I find that multiplying the “thank Yous” keeps my heart tender

and makes me aware of how comfortable and privileged is my life in America.

**Thank You that the tap water is not safe to drink.** But I thank You that safe bottled water is easy to obtain at the little market a block away. I thank You that my husband is more than willing to walk to the market so I don't have to. I thank You that replenishing the bottled water at the Bible College where we teach is a high priority, especially since it's so dry here that we need to keep drinking from our water bottles all day long. Speaking of which, thank You for my Aquafina bottle that Ray bought me at the Dallas airport. The whole label is in English!

**Thank You that this is a handicap-unfriendly country,** that there are stairs everywhere and elevators only in buildings over five stories high. Thank You that there's no point to bringing my scooter or wheelchair. Thank You that at home, I have plenty of mobility assistance. Thank you for the Americans with Disabilities Act. Thank You for allowing me to live in a country that is mainly accessible to polio survivors like me. Thank You for Lufthansa Airlines, which takes such good care of people who can't walk (or walk long distances) once I get to Germany next week.

**Thank You that I got strep the day *before* we left Dallas** and not *the morning of* our flight here! Thank You that my doctor could see me on short notice. Thank You for antibiotics that knocked it out immediately. Thank You for protecting our health while we are here.

**Thank You that languages were splintered at the tower of Babel** and we are surrounded by Slavic tongues we do not speak. Thank You for providing several gifted translators. Thank You for patience on the part of our friends here when we try to make our mouths produce unfamiliar, strange-sounding words. Thank You that in heaven, we will not need translators because we will all speak the language of the Lamb.

**Thank You for churches with outhouses rather than heated indoor restrooms.** Thank You that we are using them at the end of March rather than in January! Thank You for bathrooms at home with indoor plumbing, flush toilets, and flushable toilet paper. And thank You that our bathrooms don't stink.

**Thank You that our luggage was delayed on the way here.** But thank You for getting it to us only 24 hours later! Thank You for the lesson about what to include in my carry-on. I didn't learn that lesson when we were stranded for four days by the [Iceland ash cloud](#) two years ago, and I thank You for giving me another chance to learn the importance of packing a nightgown and a change of clothes and anything else I really need.

**Thank You for sheets that don't cover the mattress** and come undone every night. Thank You for fitted bottom sheets on all our beds in our home. Thank You for top sheets with plenty of width and length.

I've never thanked You for many of these things, Lord, and I am so grateful for them now!

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/giving\\_thanks\\_in\\_a\\_hard\\_place](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/giving_thanks_in_a_hard_place) on March 27, 2012.

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## **Forgive Myself?**

Have you ever been told how important it is to forgive yourself?

I know Christians who have struggled with doing this, some for several years, unable to get a handle on it. There's good

reason for that—scripture never even mentions forgiving ourselves, much less commanding it. I understand the idea of giving oneself forgiveness comes from humanistic psychology; doctors know that experiencing forgiveness is an essential part of mental health, but where do you find forgiveness when God, the source of forgiveness, has been excluded from the big picture?

You forgive yourself. At least, that's the way it should work in principle. When God is "Xed out." But, as many have learned, just deciding to forgive yourself sounds easier than actually doing it. On what basis do you forgive yourself? Just because? How many times do you need to beat yourself up before it's time for forgive yourself? What if you forgive yourself prematurely, before you've beaten yourself up enough?

What a mess.

I've also heard Christians say, "I know God has forgiven me, but I just can't forgive myself." It sounds quite humble, but in reality, this is upside-down pride. The underlying message is, "God may have forgiven me, but my own standards of what constitutes forgiveness are higher than God's, and my standard is what counts."

So what do we do when we're still keeping ourselves on the hook for past sins?

First, by faith receive the forgiveness that God has already granted. This has nothing to do with *feeling* forgiven and everything to do with choosing to trust that God keeps His word: "But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God has already forgiven every sin we have ever committed and ever will. He waits for us to gratefully choose to receive His amazing grace of forgiveness. *"Lord Jesus, thank You for paying my debt for my sin and restoring me to relationship with the Father. Thank You for*

*forgiving me. By faith, and in Your strength, I receive Your forgiveness and cleansing."*

Second (if necessary), we choose to take ourselves off the hook and release ourselves from being our own prisoners. We remind ourselves that Jesus said, "If the Son sets you free, you will be really free" (John 8:36). We remind ourselves that His last words on the Cross were "It is finished." His work of freeing us from our sin and making forgiveness possible is finished. Done. Over and out. Which means we can take ourselves off the hook for something Jesus already paid for.

Recently I was teaching on forgiveness and painted a word picture of being handcuffed to the person who had offended us or hurt us. Forgiveness means unlocking the cuff from around our own wrist and snapping it on Jesus' wrist, giving Him custody of our offender, releasing them into His care. Several people told me, "I realized my prisoner was ME! And Jesus was inviting me to take the handcuffs off myself!" They did, and they were free.

I love the sound of chains falling off and people being set free from their strongholds!

This blog post originally appeared at  
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13, 2012.