

“Why Is God Allowing Me to Suffer?”

I don't know what to think anymore. I am a Christian (or thought I was a child of God) and go to church weekly, tithe weekly and try to live my life according to God's Word.

I was downsized by my company last June, I have gone thru my severance and my retirement money, I am losing my home and my life. I am just weeks away from being a homeless person because I will have to walk away from my home and possessions. I have applied to over 140 jobs with nothing panning out. I have a college degree and a medical certificate and was at my company for over 12 years—I am not a slouch by any means.

I just don't know how to think about God anymore. I have talked to Him daily, confessed all known sin, studied until I am cross-eyed, I have asked daily for His help, what He wants me to learn from this, what He would like me to do for Him while I am waiting, etc. I am at a loss here and it appears He is going to allow me to be taken down and die this way. I have never been so discouraged in my life and have even considered taking it because it would end all the pain and misery. I only haven't because I am too scared of Him to do so. So where is the loving God I have been worshipping all these years? I really don't think I was saved after all because I don't think He would do this to a child of His. I have seen other Christians in my community go thru job loss and He has helped them through it all and they are back to their lives, but not me. What is wrong with me that He won't help me?

Discouraged and alone,

I am so very, very sorry for what you have been experiencing in this huge trial. It sounds like you are so discouraged and

hopeless that you are questioning if you are actually saved at all because God seems to be treating you differently than what you've seen with other Christians. You sound frustrated and panicky because God appears to be allowing everything to go down the drain. And who can blame you for feeling this way? I am so sorry.

It's especially hard in our culture where we tend to equate God's goodness and love with Him keeping us comfortable. So when we lose the things that have made our lives comfortable and livable, we question if God is still loving and good. And then we're open to the enemy's suggestion that God is neither loving nor good, and that He owes it to His children to keep us comfortable. Then, when we focus on a resulting sense of entitlement, it's easy to let a spirit of anger and bitterness grow inside.

You are not alone. Job had the exact same feelings and the exact same questions. And that is why I am so grateful for that book, because it provides a perspective we couldn't possibly know through our reason or our experience. When you've done everything right, when you've sought to examine yourself to see if there is any unconfessed sin, when you've prayed and submitted to God and still things don't change, there may well be a drama unfolding in the spiritual dimension that you can't possibly see right now. Satan was the source of attacks on Job, but God allowed it for His glory and for Job's ultimate benefit.

I don't know what God is doing in you, _____. But I do know that He is good, and that He loves you, and that He has a plan for these horribly difficult times in your life. Even if it entails losses you could never imagine. A hundred years from today, when you are with Him in heaven, it will make sense. This is not the end, even if it can feel like it.

I think more and more Christians will find themselves in similar situations, where we become dependent on other members

of the Body of Christ to survive difficult financial seasons in our lives. I believe this is why the Word says that it is important to stay connected to the Body in community, because community helps us with both discouragement and the isolation of aloneness. The Body of Christ is His “aloneness-fighter” for each other. And I pray you will be able to find resources for support in your church, or a church in your area that follows the Bible’s pattern for taking care of each other.

I wish I had a solution for you, _____. All I know is that God is still God, and love is still driving all His dealings with you. I know that He wants to bless you and glorify Himself, even if His definition of blessing is not what you would choose right now. I send this with a prayer that you will experience His provision and His love in new and deeper ways, regardless of how He provides for you, and regardless of how He shows His love for you.

With sincere concern,

Sue Bohlin

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“Is Hypnosis Spiritually Safe for Childbirth Pain Control?”

My friend, a Christian for about four years, is a doula [a trained childbirth assistant and labor coach]. One of her recent clients has expressed an interest in hypno-birthing as a method for laboring. I expressed my concerns to my friend and she assures me that it is harmless. She says that you are in total control and place yourself in the hypnotic state

where you would not do anything that goes against what you believe. I'm not so sure that I believe hypnotism is harmless; can you help me?

According to the trustworthy book *Mind Games: Exposing Today's Psychics, Frauds, and False Spiritual Phenomena* by André Kole and Jerry MacGregor, hypnosis can have legitimate medical benefits such as pain control, weight loss and smoking cessation. They report that your friend's assurance that a person undergoing hypnosis can't be forced to do anything that goes against one's will or one's beliefs is valid.

They explain that hypnosis is not truly understood and cannot be empirically proven (i.e., there is no brain wave difference for those undergoing hypnosis). There is no clear definition of a trance, and no one knows how it works. They say,

"The simplest way to understand hypnosis is to regard it as a state of mind characterized by increased suggestibility—the acceptance of an idea without being critical of it. It is a method of bypassing the conscious mind. Whatever is presented to the subconscious mind, under certain conditions, may be automatically accepted and acted upon."

The power of hypnosis, then, is faith. The person being hypnotized must want to be hypnotized, they must trust the hypnotist, and they have to be consciously open to whatever is suggested to them. They have faith in the hypnotist and in the process, and willingly submit to it. Kole and MacGregor say, "In one sense, when you submit to hypnosis, you actually give control of yourself and your mind to another individual. Therefore you should be extremely cautious about who you submit yourself to." Since we are not to be controlled by anything except the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), the "green light" to use hypnosis would have to include accountability to make sure that the hypnotist, for laboring or anything else, is honorable in their intentions and in their practice.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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“What About People Who Live Longer than 120 Years?”

In Genesis 6, God says man will not live past 120 years of age. I heard that someone lived to be around 140 in modern times. I searched this out and found a woman was reported to have lived 122 years. How can we explain this apparent contradiction to the Bible?

Let's look at what Genesis 6:3 actually says.

Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”

There are two interpretations that have been offered, and they can both be true at the same time. One is that the 120 years refers to how much longer God would allow mankind to live on the earth before He sent the Flood.

The second interpretation is that God was about to limit the individual lifespans of mankind to 120 years, which would start to happen after the Flood. (You can see the decline recorded in Genesis 11 by noting the ages at which the patriarchs died.) That is the upper limit for all but a few hardy souls, such as the one you found. This is not a contradiction in the Bible since the middle-Eastern mindset from which the Bible was written was not concerned with the

excruciating attention to detail and minute accuracy that our Western mindsets have come to expect. It's not wrong, and it's not a contradiction—it's just a different way of seeing things. Consider the difference between 120 and the amazing longevity of pre-flood folks: Noah lived 950 years, Adam 930, Methuselah 969. The point is the difference between 969 and 120, not the difference between 120 and 122. Does that make sense?

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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“Can I Divorce My Bipolar Wife for Cheating Unawares?”

My wife is bipolar. I have read that someone with this disease can have a sexual encounter and not remember it. If this is so and I find out, could I divorce her for adultery or cheating?

This is difficult situation, and you have my sympathy. It's hard to live with the extreme mood swings of someone with bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression). But it's even harder to BE that person, I assure you!

When people experience blackouts during manic episodes, they are not in control. Their mental illness is in control. Like those with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID, formerly known as multiple personality disorder), they can discover that they did things they would never have chosen if they were in their “right mind.” A dear friend of mine tells me that one of her “alters” (personalities) was a smoker although she was not. She would just find the cigarette butts and wonder why the car smelled like smoke!

This means that if you learn your wife had a sexual encounter that she did not choose and does not remember, it would be unfair and unloving to hold it against her.

Do you remember the part of your wedding vows that says, “in sickness and in health”? Your wife has a sickness. If she got cancer, would you divorce her for not being healthy? If you became disabled, would you want her to divorce you because you couldn't provide for her?

It sounds like you might be looking for a loophole to justify divorcing your wife. I respectfully urge you to close down that search and open up a new one for a marriage counselor.

Cordially,

“How Do You Witness to an ‘Ex-Christian’?”

How do you witness to an “ex-Christian” – someone who claims that they tried Jesus Christ and “He didn’t work”?

I would suggest asking gently probing questions in hopes of getting the person’s story. Usually this means they had unrealistic expectations to begin with. It also often means they were expecting a linear kind of “A causes B” relationship, similar to “I drink Red Bull, and I get a buzz of energy” or “I take an antibiotic and I get better.” In our culture, it’s easy to see Christianity as a sort of cosmic vending machine where we put in our “coins” of going to church, reading the Bible, asking God for what we want through prayer, giving money. . . and expecting Him to give us what we want in return.

But biblical Christianity doesn’t work that way, because biblical Christianity is a personal relationship with the living God who is totally other-than, totally different from us; a God who is a gentle shepherd and a consuming fire all at the same time. It requires us to surrender; it requires trustful obedience of One we cannot see, touch, or hear.

No wonder our puny human expectations don’t “work” with this kind of God!

Many times, people who have chunked their faith, or who “tried Jesus and He didn’t work,” have run up against the problem of pain and evil. This is the big issue that is the single biggest stumbling block for most people who have problems with belief in Christ. God allowed something to happen that caused them pain, and they are upset with Him for that. They blame God for not protecting them from pain and sorrow. And their hurt and disappointment with God deserves to be heard and affirmed. It matters to God, so it MATTERS! And we can be God’s channel for communicating that assurance.

So I suggest you ask questions such as, “I’d love to hear your story of how you came to that conclusion.” And, “What were you expecting in ‘trying Jesus’?”

Really, you’re asking for help in understanding the underlying heart issue, and then be sure to express a sincere concern for whatever they tell you.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

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Newsweek’s Gay Marriage Propaganda Piece

The Dec. 15 (2008) issue of *Newsweek* features a breathtakingly biased essay called “The Religious Case for Gay Marriage.” The author, Lisa Miller, has a high view of homosexuality and a low view of scripture—and an even lower view of those of us who dare trust in God’s word. (Managing Editor Jon Meacham supports Ms. Miller’s piece in his column: he says the

“conservative resort to biblical authority is the worst kind of fundamentalism.”)

Both Ms. Miller’s logic and her understanding of scripture and theology are riddled with problems. Let’s look at a few.

The biblical illustrations of marriage are so undesirable that no sensible person would want theirs to look like it. Abraham slept with his servant because his wife was infertile. Jacob fathered children by four mothers. Polygamy abounded in the patriarchs and the kings. Jesus and Paul were unmarried, Paul regarding “marriage as an act of last resort for those unable to contain their animal lusts.”

People have been making this mistake for years, taking the narrative sections of scripture and inferring that this is what God says to do since “it’s in the Bible.” As my friend Dan Lacich put it, it is the mistake of taking the “descriptive” and making it “prescriptive.” That would be like charging the editorial board of the *Dallas Morning News* with being pro-murder and pro-steroid abuse because it published news stories about those issues.

It’s true that the Biblical account includes a stunning array of ways to mess up God’s simple and beautiful plan for marriage. If we keep reading, it also includes the heartbreaking consequences of violating that plan. And, in the Song of Solomon, it also includes a lavish treatment of romantic love between a husband and a wife that illustrates how good it can be.

“[T]he Bible is a living document, powerful for more than 2000 years because its truths speak to us even as we change through history. In that light, Scripture gives us no good reason why gays and lesbians should not be (civilly and religiously) married—and a number of excellent reasons why they should.”

It’s clear Ms. Miller agrees with Bible scholar Alan Segal that “the Bible was written by men and not handed down in its

leather bindings by God.” (I’ve never come across a single individual who actually believed a physical book was plopped in anyone’s lap from heaven, but we keep hearing this argument.) Robert Gagnon, professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, points out that while scripture has a human element, it is not *merely* the compilation of human ideas. The ideas behind the words written down by men come from the mind of the same God who created men and women, and who invented sex and marriage. Ms. Miller is wrong about gay marriage because she disregards the truth of God’s word in favor of human philosophies, about which we are warned not to be taken captive (Col. 2:8).

“Most of us no longer heed Leviticus on haircuts or blood sacrifices. Why would we still accept its stance on homosexuality?”

Ms. Miller mentions the two proscriptions against homosexual behavior in Leviticus 18 and 20 as “throwaway lines in a peculiar text given over to codes for living in the ancient Jewish world.” This is a common argument for dismissing the Bible’s stance on same-sex behavior, but it’s not that simple. Both chapters forbid child sacrifice, adultery, incest, bestiality, and homosexuality. Why wrench the one verse on homosexuality out of each chapter’s context to throw away and keep all the surrounding prohibitions? We never hear this argument used to normalize having sex with one’s child or one’s father or one’s dog. Nor should we. Ever.

Sexual issues are moral issues. They are not in the same category as laws for haircuts or blood sacrifices. We know this because sexual laws don’t change over time, as did civil and ceremonial laws. Moral commands are rooted in the character of God, specifically His purity and holiness. His character does not change over time, and neither do His commands about how we are to express our sexuality.

“While the Bible and Jesus say many important things about

love and family, neither explicitly defines marriage as between one man and one woman."

If we're looking for an in-your-face 21st-century kind of Bible verse that says "Marriage is only between one man and one woman," we won't find it. What we do find is an equally in-your-face first-century teaching about marriage from the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself. In Matthew 19:4-5, He puts back to back two important verses from the foundational creation account of Genesis 1 and 2: "Male and female He created them (1:27) and said, 'For this reason a man shall . . . be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh' (2:24)." (Also found in Mark 10:6-8.) This was the creation. This was the original intent. All variations on this are corruptions of God's intent.

Jesus never mentioned homosexuality. . .

He didn't have to, for the same reason we have no record of Him denouncing nuclear war. It was unthinkable in the Jewish culture to which He spoke. If you look in the historical records of the time, references to homosexuality just aren't there. Not that it didn't ever occur in private, but that it was off the "radar screen," so to speak. There were also no advocates for same-sex relationships in the Jewish culture. (But there were in the Gentile culture to which Paul was called as an apostle, which explains why *he* addresses homosexual behavior and calls it sin.)

Dr. Gagnon writes about Jesus,

"Telling his audience in first-century Palestine that men should stop having sex with other males would have been met with perplexity since the point was too well known, too foundational, and too strongly accepted to merit mention. I myself have never been in a church where the pastor explained why believers shouldn't be in a sexual relationship with their parent, child, or sibling or shouldn't enter a

polyamorous relationship. I have never thought that the reason for this is that the minister was open to incest or polyamory of an adult-committed sort."

. . .But he roundly condemns divorce.

Again, Dr. Gagnon insightfully points out:

"Jesus takes time to condemn divorce/remarriage not because it is a more serious violation of God's sexual norms than homosexual practice—or than incest or bestiality, two other sexual offenses that Jesus also never explicitly mentions—but because it, along with lust of the heart, was a remaining loophole in the law of Moses that needed to be closed. The law already clearly closed off any option for engaging in homosexual practice, incest, bestiality, and adultery, whatever the excuse."

The *Newsweek* article closes with a quote from Ms. Miller's priest friend James Martin. "In his heart he believes that if Jesus were alive today, he would reach out especially to the gays and lesbians among us, for 'Jesus does not want people to be lonely and sad.'" I couldn't agree more. I can easily picture the Lord walking into gay bars with a warm smile on His face and open arms, ready to look straight past the shame that holds so many same sex attracted people in its grip, and offer them the embrace of grace instead. But He wouldn't be officiating at any gay weddings. He would lovingly exhort them, one by one, as He did the woman caught in adultery: "Go and sin no more." It's true He doesn't want people to be lonely and sad. His intention is for the community of His body to provide the sense of legitimate belonging and significance that people are seeking in gay marriage. As is often the case, the joy He offers is so much more than our too-little dreams and hopes. But it's freely available.

I am grateful for the insights of two excellent commentaries

on this issue:

Dan Lacich's blog, Provocative Christian Living,
<http://provocativechristian.wordpress.com/2008/12/12/newsweek-magazine-and-the-case-for-gay-marriage/>,
and

Dr. Robert Gagnon's article "More than 'Mutual Joy': Lisa Miller of Newsweek against Scripture and Jesus,"
<http://www.robgagnon.net/NewsweekMillerHomosexResp.htm>

This commentary was originally published on [Tapestry](#), the Bible.org Women's blog, and is used by permission.

"Why Do More Educated People Tend to Deny the Existence of God?"

Why do you suppose that the more highly educated a person becomes, the less likely they are to believe in a God?

What a great question!!

In my "wisdom journal," I have recorded this insight from Dr. Peter Kreeft, professor at Boston College:

Intellectuals resist faith longer because they can: where ordinary people are helpless before the light, intellectuals are clever enough to spin webs of darkness around their minds and hide in them. That's why only Ph.D.s believe any of the 100 most absurd ideas in the world (such as Absolute Relativism, or the Objective Truth of Subjectivism, of the Meaningfulness of Meaninglessness and the Meaninglessness of Meaning, which is the best definition of Deconstructionism I

know).

I loved the timing of your question. My husband just returned from his fifth year of teaching Christian worldview to hundreds of school teachers in Liberia, West Africa. The vast majority of the teachers have no more than a middle school education. When explaining the three major worldviews—atheism/naturalism, pantheism and theism—he has discovered that most of these teachers are flabbergasted that anyone would deny that there is a God. They have lived their whole lives permeated by the spiritual, so when they learned that some people deny the existence of God, that didn't make sense. Even in their traditional African religion (animism), embracing the spiritual was as natural as breathing.

So glad you wrote.

Sue Bohlin

P.S. I have observed this same phenomenon Dr. Kreeft notes—of higher intelligence, often reflected in higher education—appearing in those who embrace and celebrate homosexuality as normal and natural. It takes a higher degree of mental acumen to be able to do the mental gymnastics it takes to avoid the clear and simple truth that “the parts don't fit.” Not physically, and not psychologically.

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“Conflicting Genealogies of

Christ?"

How do you reconcile the difference in Christ's genealogy given in Matthew and Luke?

Bible.org answers your question here: bible.org/question/why-do-matthew-and-lukes-genealogies-contradict-one-another:

"Matthew and Luke actually give two different genealogies. Matthew give the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, the legal, though not the physical father of Jesus. Luke, on the other hand, gives the ancestry of Jesus through Mary from whom Jesus was descended physically as to his humanity. This is a beautiful fulfillment of prophecy and actually testifies to the accuracy of the Bible. Through Joseph, Jesus became the legal heir to the throne while at the same time bypassed the curse of Coniah as prophesied in Jeremiah 22:24-30. Both, of course, were in the line of David so that Jesus had a legal right to the throne as the adopted son of Joseph and was at the same time a physical descendent of David through Mary.

"The Ryrie Study Bible gives an excellent summary of the issues here:

Although Coniah had seven sons (perhaps adopted; cf. 1 Chron. 3:17), none occupied the throne. So, as far as a continuing dynasty was concerned, Coniah was to be considered "childless." Although his line of descendants retained the legal throne rights, no physical descendant (no man of his descendants) would ever prosperously reign on the Davidic throne. The genealogy of Matthew traces the descent of Jesus through Solomon and Jeconiah (Heb., Coniah; Matt. 1:12); this is the genealogy of Jesus' legal father, Joseph. Luke traces Jesus' physical descent back through Mary and Nathan to

David, bypassing Jeconiah's line and showing accurately the fulfillment of this prophecy of Jeremiah. If Jesus had been born only in the line of Joseph (and thus of Jeconiah), He would not have been qualified to reign on the throne of David in the Millennium. See note on Matt. 1:11."

Blessings,

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries Webmistress

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I have noticed that there is an error in your article concerning the genealogies of Christ. You say that the line goes through Mary in Luke, but this is not so, I have looked this up in the NIV, ESV and the Bible in my own language. Luke chapter 3:21-38 does not even mention Mary, it says Joseph. This still creates a conflict in the genealogy. Maybe I am reading this wrong. In the Matthew account it says: ". . .Mary, of whom is born the Christ. . ." one can argue for Mary in the Matthew account, but this feels like a stretch.

Glad you asked! It's not an error; this has been a point of discussion among Bible scholars for many years. Here's insight from the GotQuestions.org website, answering the question, "Why are Jesus' genealogies in Matthew and Luke so different?"

"[M]ost conservative Bible scholars assume Luke is recording Mary's genealogy and Matthew is recording Joseph's. Matthew is following the line of Joseph (Jesus' legal father), through David's son Solomon, while Luke is following the line of Mary (Jesus' blood relative), through David's son Nathan. There was no Greek word for "son-in-law," and Joseph would have been considered a son of Heli through marrying Heli's daughter Mary. Through either line, Jesus is a descendant of David and therefore eligible to be the Messiah. Tracing a genealogy through the mother's side is unusual, but so was

the virgin birth. Luke's explanation is that Jesus was the son of Joseph, "so it was thought" (Luke 3:23).

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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Turning Thanksgiving Inside Out

Time to be thinking about the holidays. Next one up, Thanksgiving.

Oh joy.

It's not too hard to come up with a list of reasons to grump about the Thanksgiving holiday:

- Lots of work in the kitchen
- Lots of cleaning to do
- Lots of cooking to do
- Lots of buying food to do
- Crowds in the stores as we prepare
- The stores already have their Christmas decorations out—like since Halloween
- Spending time with family where the worst in people easily spills out
- Too much football on TV
- Too much food

But to cultivate a biblical mindset, we can take this list and turn it inside out to reveal the embarrassment of riches and

lavishment of blessings that are attached to each item by invoking our own personal thanksgiving:

Lots of work in the kitchen: Thank You, Lord, that I have a fully functioning kitchen! Thank You for my stove and my oven and my refrigerator and my sink and my counters and my storage of my many many kitchen items.

Lots of cleaning to do: Thank You, Lord, for running water that is safe and tastes good. Thank you for a sink that drains. Thank You for buckets. Thank You for dusting cloths and my vacuum. Thank You for the energy to clean!

Lots of cooking to do: Thank You, Lord, for recipes. Thank You that my stove and oven work! Thank You for the various pots and pans that enable me to cook more than one item at a time. Thank You that I can store cooked things in my fridge until it's time to bring them out, and thank You for the microwave to zap them to serving temperature.

Lots of buying food to do: Oh Lord! Thank You for money to buy our Thanksgiving meal! Thank You for well-stocked grocery stores with a dazzling number of choices. Thank You for 24/7 electricity that powers refrigerators and freezers, both in my home and in the stores, which means I don't have to go to a market every single day for provisions. Thank You that I have the luxury of making a list, driving to the store, and getting everything on my list because it will all be there and I don't even have to think about it.

Crowds in the stores as we prepare: Thank You, Lord, that all those people also have the money to be able to make our purchases. Thank You for a culture where people will wait in line instead of all demanding to be served first. Thank You for stores to go to in the first place.

The stores already have their Christmas decorations out-like since Halloween: Thank You, Lord, that we live in a place that still celebrates Your birth even if many forget YOU. Thank You

for Christmas decorations period. It means we are in a country that understands the importance of Your impact on our culture.

Spending time with family where the worst in people easily spills out: Thank You, Lord, for giving us families. Thank You for people to love, even if sometimes it needs to be in Your strength because we don't like them right then. Thank You for these people You chose to be in our lives. Thank You that being with family, even if it's church family and not bio-family, means we are not alone and isolated.

Too much football on TV: Thank You, Lord, that we even have a television. Thank You for a culture and a lifestyle with the luxury of offering entertainment instead of constant, unrelenting survival mode. Thank You for living room furniture to sit in or lie on while we watch TV. Thank You that the football is only for a few days and not every day!

Too much food: Thank You, Lord! Thank You! Thank You! Millions of people are starving and cannot even imagine the abundance of food at our meal. We are so blessed for every single dish and every single item we get to prepare and serve and then eat. You have lavished blessing and honor on us, and we don't deserve any of it. Thank You. Thank You.

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