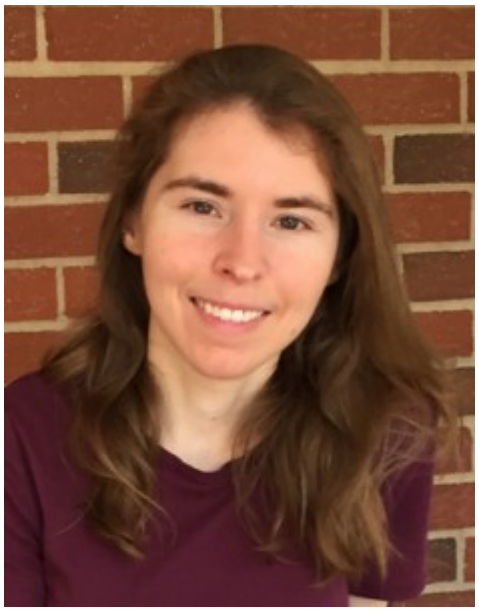
# Is God Still Doing Miracles?

*I asked Cara Polsley, author of the forthcoming book* The Bible and the Holographic Universe, *to share her faith-building story that encourages me to ask big, bold prayers of a God who is still willing to do the miraculous.*



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"He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen" (Deut. 10:21, NKJV).

Moses spoke these words to Israel over 3,000 years ago. Fast-forwarding to today, I understand what he means. We don't always notice God moving. After all, not everyone crosses a sea on dry land or drinks water from a rock. But God is the same God, still doing miracles. When He does, it's a praise to share them.

That's why it's a praise to give you a glimpse of what the Lord has done for my family since a car accident almost killed us and left me paralyzed in 2013.

It was a beautiful summer day with barely a cloud in the sky, a perfect day for a family gathering. Seven of us were driving home on the highway. We'd had car trouble and were being followed miles behind by my father in a tow truck, but otherwise, it had been a happy morning.

The accident happened in an instant. A distracted driver began speeding. "That guy's going to hit us," my brother remembers thinking. The car rammed our bumper and sent our SUV flipping. We flipped about eight times before landing upside-down nearby. My oldest brother rolled onto the pavement. He was on his feet immediately, running after us. Even though he had been thrown out at fifty-five miles an hour, he was only scratched and bruised. Responding officers were incredulous. "Really, how'd you get here?" one asked. Today, my brother has a small scar on his arm.

Our youngest brother was also tossed out on impact. Fully aware, he stood up and walked around shakily until he felt dizzy. At the hospital, doctors found that his lower back had been broken and had then fused together on the spot. After a brief stint in ICU, he was released. He's now a thriving researcher, teacher, and graduate student, always on the go.

Our niece and nephew, five and three, were still fastened in their seats beside the broken windows. Neither child was admitted to the hospital or had any substantial injuries, even though my nephew spent several months blaming every bug bite and bruise on the accident.

God wasn't done. My father observed that photographs revealed a "bubble of protection" around my mother's place in the driver's seat. The glass and steering wheel in front of her was intact. Her neck and wrist were broken, and she had sustained a severe concussion. After some time in ICU and months of occupational therapy, Mom returned to a busy life working and being an exceptional wife, mother, and grandmother. Her hands dance across the piano keyboard without

a trace of injury, much less of a shattered wrist.

My sister-in-law, riding in the passenger seat, had four breaks in her arm. She was told that she would require surgery and that the arm would never be normal again. Four days later, she was in such terrible pain that she went to the local hospital. Her doctor “happened” to be leaving as she entered the ER, and was able to arrange rapid X-rays.

The orthopedic specialist soon came into the room and began unwrapping her arm. “What are you doing?” she exclaimed. “This arm has never been broken,” he said. “And I want to ask you, who grabbed your arm in the accident?” Her elbow bore a bruise shaped like a handprint with thumb and fingers from the outside, as if someone had clasped her elbow. No human had. We’d all been conscious; her window had been unbroken, and she’d crawled out without help.

I was thrown from the car and landed face-down in the grass. My lungs had collapsed. I couldn’t breathe and couldn’t feel my legs. There was an obvious spinal cord injury. An EMS worker named Luke—like the doctor in the Bible—“happened” to be driving home from work and stopped to help. He had special training in spinal injuries and called for a LifeFlight. I can honestly say that I had no fear in the accident or its aftermath. Jesus was with us every step of the way. “God, be with me,” I prayed, knowing He was.

Doctors said that if I survived 6+-hour surgery, I’d never walk again. My spinal cord had been severed. On a respirator, I couldn’t communicate until my sister-in-law interpreted my clumsy letters in sign language. Thankfully, my hands were uninjured, but my neck, back, and ribs had been crushed. Taking a breath, lifting a cup of water, sitting up—everything took effort.

At the end of in-patient rehabilitation, with a lot of assistance, I took six small steps at the parallel bars. Those

steps justified out-patient therapy. However, therapists soon determined that the progress was insufficient. “You’ll grow old in a wheelchair,” a well-meaning physical therapist said. “You may see small changes, but they won’t be significant.” Without significant changes, we had a problem. My Ph.D.’s first year had ended with a literal bang. Within the year, I had to resume studies or forfeit my fellowship at an Ivy League program halfway across the country. Additionally, every day off my feet threatened blood pressure issues, worse osteoporosis, and reduced function. How could school happen?

On January 1, 2014, God gave the idea of standing leaning against the kitchen sink (not recommended here). The first day, I stood propped against the counter for four minutes. Three months later, I’d worked up to fourteen hours a day, and was approved for knee-locking leg braces like those used by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Reviewers initially denied the request, but our clinician insisted on letting us try. While waiting, I practiced inching backward with full-length ACL braces and a rolling walker built by my father. A month later, I could go forward with actual braces.

In August 2014, living on prayer and family collaboration, Dad and I made the three-day drive back to school. I couldn’t get up or down from a chair, shuffle to campus in less than an hour, lift a laptop, or carry a book. However, the disabilities office and my academic department were part of God’s provision through countless obstacles. What they could not do, we innovated and prayed to accomplish. They provided a mobility scooter for transportation, placed a podium in each classroom so that I could stand during class, and arranged additional scanning on request through the library. Using a lightweight backpack with safety straps, I managed to carry a computer tablet that weighed about three pounds.

By spring, I was living independently with morning and evening support. One day, bringing home coursework that included a paper facsimile of a certain Egyptian artifact, I texted a

photo to my parents: “I just carried the Rosetta Stone!” The rigorous schedule combined teaching, classes, Ph.D. exams, and lectures—academic life—with demands of self-therapy at the gym, sleepless nights, health struggles, and, unwittingly, a broken ankle. But I was singing, loving how God was making things possible. “You believe in God,” a puzzled unbelieving friend observed, “and He is healing you.”

Two examples of His provision. On a high-nutrition diet, I prayed for fish and eggs. The cafeteria, open for select meals on weekdays, served more fish and eggs than usual that week. Later, realizing that the fridge held extra supplies, I randomly opened my Bible to Luke 11:11-13, reading, “[I]f (a son shall) ask a fish, will (his father) for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?” Another time, I fell at 3 a.m. No one was nearby. Pulling the wall-mounted emergency cord would summon noisy firetrucks. I asked the Lord to preserve the testimony by helping me onto my feet. To this day, it’s a mystery how I got up from the floor.

Christmas 2015 brought a devastating setback. We discovered that my leg was, as doctors said, “impressively” broken due to SCI-induced osteoporosis. After extensive surgery, I wrote my dissertation prospectus lying in bed with an external metal fixator bolted to the bones of my right leg. The leg recovered better than expected.

On the day that I was preparing to travel back to school, I fell. My left leg was now clearly broken. While God hadn’t prevented surgery on the right leg, we prayed. This was it. If He didn’t intervene, there wasn’t enough medical leave left in the Ph.D. program. If God wanted me to finish, He had to make a way.

We prayed for five minutes. At the end, my knee was completely healed, as if nothing had happened. After an hour, we got in the car and were on the road.

Ultimately, the Lord guided through the remainder of the Ph.D. Although officials were too nervous to have me walk across the stage during graduation ceremonies, I walked across it before the diploma ceremony began. It was all Jesus.

I still do hours of walking with braces each day, and am still paralyzed. Nothing is what you would call normal. I believe more is coming, and pray and work toward it, as God wills. Meanwhile, He's opened doors for writing, teaching, speaking, and more. He continues to do miracles. Though they are not always as expected, His glory and His mercy are everywhere. Sometimes He makes our dependency plainer than others. In those times, it's especially humbling. Still, isn't salvation the greatest miracle, and isn't abundant Christian life meant to testify to God's glory (Col. 3:23-24)?

As Moses said, God is all about "great and awesome things." I praise Him for the opportunity to share some wonders that these eyes have seen, and pray that my story, His story, encourages you to watch for Him actively every day—and to realize that He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/is-god-still-doing-miracles/ on March 15, 2022.

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# What God Says About Sex – A Christian Perspective on Human Sexuality

*Sue Bohlin provides us a succinct Christian perspective on human sexuality. She points out that God created sex and has a purpose for it defined within the context of marriage. When we*

*lose sight of God's perspective, sex can degrade into a pastime for pleasure that will ultimately hurt us physically, emotionally and spiritually.*

## The Pickle Principle



It's not surprising that in a time of growing biblical illiteracy, so few people have any idea what God thinks and says about the extremely important subject of sex. The world holds the Christian view of sex in contempt, considering it prudish, naïve and repressive. But the Bible elevates sexuality as God's gift to us that is both sacred and mysterious. The world's perspective degrades it to just something that feels good—another form of recreation or socialization.

Counselor Waylon Ward offers an insightful way to understand the problem, which he calls "the Pickle Principle." In order to make pickles, we put cucumbers in a brine solution of vinegar, spices, and water. After a cucumber soaks in the brine long enough, it is changed into a pickle. Most of us are like pickles. We sit in the brine of a sex-saturated culture, absorbing its values and beliefs, and it changes the way we think. Even most Christians are pickled today, believing and acting exactly like everyone else who has been sitting in the brine of a culture hostile to God and His Word.

The world's sex-saturated brine includes the belief that sex is the ultimate pleasure. The message of much TV, movies, and music is that there is no greater pleasure available, and that it is the right of every individual, even teenagers, to have this pleasure.{1} Another aspect of this pickling process is the belief that no one has the right to deprive anyone else of this greatest of all human pleasures, that no one has the right to tell anyone else what is right or wrong about the expression of his or her sexuality.{2}

If the purpose and goal of sex is primarily pleasure, then other people are just objects to be used for sensual gratification. Since people are infinitely valuable because God made us in His image, that is a slap in the face whether we realize it or not. The Christian perspective is that the purpose of sex is relational, with pleasure as the by-product. The Bible teaches that sex welds two souls together.{3} It is so powerful that it is only safe within a committed, covenant marriage relationship. It's like the difference between the wild energy of lightning compared to the harnessed power of electricity. God knew what He was doing when He limited sex to within marriage!

God wants to get His "pickled people" out of the world's brine and into an intimate relationship with Him. He wants to change our thinking and beliefs to be in alignment with His.

## Sex is God's Invention! The Purpose of Sex

Sex is God's idea. He made it not only efficient for making babies, but pleasurable and deeply satisfying. He designed men's and women's body parts to complement each other. He created hormones to make everything work right and make us want to be sexual. Unlike animals, whose mating behavior is purely instinctive for the purpose of reproducing, human sexuality has several wonderful purposes. God means for all of them to be contained within marriage.

In a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between husband and wife, we can express and enjoy God's two major purposes to sex: fruitfulness and intimacy. His first command to Adam and Eve was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28); one very foundational purpose of sex is to create new living beings. Fruitfulness is not limited to having children, though. A mutually loving and serving sexual relationship between husband and wife can produce emotional and personal

fruitfulness as well. Both people are nurtured to grow, develop, and soar, becoming more of what God means them to be.

The other big purpose for sex, emotional and physical intimacy, is only possible within marriage. In his little gem of a book called What God Says About Sex,{4} Eric Elder says that intimacy really means "into-me-see." It is only safe to reveal the fullness of who we are, "warts and all," to someone who loves us and has committed to be faithful and supportive "till death do us part." The fullest experience and freedom of sex is found within the marriage bed, which God says to keep holy or set apart.{5} God says that we are to use self-control to keep all expressions of sexuality limited to marriage.{6}

Sex also builds oneness, a mystical union of two lives and souls into one life together. The one-flesh union of sex is a picture of the way two souls are joined together into a shared life. In fact, we could say that sex is like solder that is used to fuse two pieces of metal together. Once they are joined, it is a strong bond that helps keep marriages and families intact, which is God's intention for our lives. Another purpose of sex is the pleasure that comes from being safe in another's love. The entire book of Song of Solomon is gorgeous poetry that glorifies married sexual relations.

God also says that an important purpose of sex is to serve as an earthbound illustration of the mystical but real unity of Christ and the church, where two very different, very *other* beings are joined together as one. This spiritual component to sex is what helps us see more clearly why any and all sex outside of marriage falls far short of God's intention for it to be holy and sacred—and protected.

## So . . . What Does God Actually Say?

A lot of people believe the Bible says, "Sex is fun and it feels good, so don't do it." Nothing could be farther from the truth! Sex was God's great idea in the first place! But God's

view of sex as a sacred and private gift to married couples, as well as a gift each spouse gives to the other, is at great odds with the world's perspective of sex as simply a pleasure no one should deny him- or herself.

The overarching statement God makes is that sex is to be completely contained within marriage.{7} As I said above, sex is so powerful that it's like the difference between the wild, uncontrollable power of lightning compared to the safety of harnessed electricity in our buildings. God wants us to harness the power of sex within marriage. This means that all other expressions of sexuality are off-limits, not because God is a cosmic killjoy, but because He loves us and knows what's best for us, namely, not playing with lightning! So God says not to engage in sex with anyone before marriage, with anyone else once we are married, with anyone of the same sex; or with prostitutes, or with family members, or with animals.

God says that sexual purity is a treasure to be guarded and valued. It is a reflection of God's own character, which is what makes it so valuable. In our culture, many people have been deceived into thinking that their virginity is worthless, something to get rid of. But God says it is special,{8} a gift that can we can only bestow on one person, one time. God calls us to purity after marriage as well by remaining faithful to our spouse. Purity before and during marriage prevents "ghosts" in the marriage bed; comparisons are nowhere as deadly as in the intensely intimate realm of sex. We glorify God in our sexuality by using self-control to stay pure if single, and by loving our spouse sexually if married.

The good news is that purity can be restored if we confess our sin and put our trust in Jesus to forgive us and give us a new, holy quality of life. The Bible promises, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."{9} God stands ready to forgive and cleanse us, and restore our purity the moment we ask.

God says that sex is to be reserved for adults only. Three times in the Song of Solomon, a beautiful book extolling the glory of married sex, it says, “Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires,” which means “until the time is right.”{10} As I minister to sexually broken people,{11} most of them bear the still-painful scars of childhood sexual abuse from people who never should have opened a door to sexual experience. Their entire view of sex has been warped and skewed. God never meant for children to be introduced to sex. It’s for adults. *Married* adults.

God wants us to actively fight sexual temptation. The battle is harder than it’s ever been because of our sex-saturated culture. He says to flee immorality.{12} In fact, God says to offer not even a *hint* of sexual immorality.{13} That means that it is a violation of His intentions to engage in phone sex with strangers, or virtual sex in chat rooms and porn sites. The fact that you’re not physically touching another person’s body doesn’t mean it’s not sin, because Jesus said that sexual sin happens in the mind first.{14}

Eric Elder suggests asking a powerful question to help clarify the battle against sexual temptation: will this lead to greater intimacy and fruitfulness with the husband or wife God has created for me?{15} This filter is helpful for both married people and singles. If an action doesn’t build intimacy or fruitfulness, it probably destroys them. Another question to ask is, Can I glorify God in what my flesh wants to do? Can I invite Jesus into what I’m about to do? If the answer is no, God invites us to meet the struggle with *His* supernatural energy instead of our own puny human strength.{16}

Outside of the safety of marriage, sex is wounding and hurtful, but God created it for our pleasure and delight. In the Song of Solomon, God enthusiastically invites the newlyweds to enjoy His good gift of sex, where He says, “Eat, friends, and drink, o lovers!”{17} In fact, God wants married

couples to bless each other by enjoying sex often and regularly.{18}

Are you surprised by what God says about sex?

## Why Sexual Sin Hurts So Much

Pastors and counselors will tell you that there is a greater intensity of shame and pain in the people they counsel when the issues involve sexual sin.{19} Paul says that all other sins are outside our bodies,{20} but sexual sin touches you deep in your heart and soul.

As mentioned above, it may be helpful to think of sex like solder. God created it to make a strong, powerful bond that creates healthy, stable families into which children are welcomed. But when people fuse their souls through sexual sin without the safety and commitment of marriage, it causes tremendous pain when the relationship rips apart. (Have you ever seen a broken weld? It's pretty ugly.) When sex is disconnected from love and commitment, it also disconnects the body from the soul. This inflicts deep wounds of shame and guilt on a heart that has been used for gratification instead of love.

Waylon Ward says that sex sins expose and exploit our deepest emotional and spiritual vulnerabilities. He writes, "In the counseling office, individuals rarely if ever weep scalding tears about any other sense of loss like they do for a sexual relationship when it ends. There are soul ties that bind two partners together in unseen ways and there is a sense that part of you has been stolen. There is a hole in your soul where the connection was ripped from you."{21}

The pickling brine of our culture's increased sensuality says, "If it feels good, do it. You're entitled." But while this belief about sex may *feel* good, it is most definitely not good for us. Note the runaway epidemic of sexually transmitted

diseases, and the resulting increase in infertility. Note the number of broken hearts and broken families. Note the alarming amount of sexual abuse. Note the soaring rates of depression, especially in teens, much of which is related to sexual activity outside of marriage.

God invented sex for His glory and our benefit. His basic rule—keep sex inside marriage—isn't meant to be a killjoy, but to protect our hearts and bodies and relationships and families. He knows what He's doing, and we do well to follow.

**Notes**

1. Waylon Ward, *Sex Matters: Men Winning the Battle* (McKinney, Texas: Allison O'Neil Publishing Company, 2004), 7.

2. Ibid., 8.

3. Genesis 2:24;1 Corinthians 6:15-16.

4. Eric Elder, *What God Says About Sex* (Inspiringbooks.com, an imprint of Eric Elder, 2006). Contact theranch.org/2006/07/03/bookstore-what-god-says-about-sex/ for more information.

5. Hebrews 13:4.

6. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

7. There are 44 prohibitions of *porneia* (sexual expression outside of marriage, usually translated "sexual immorality"), just within the New Testament alone. This is where God draws the line between sex within marriage and sex outside of marriage, which determines what is sin and what is not.

8. Song of Solomon 4:12.

9. 1 John 1:9.

10. Song of Solomon 2:7, 3:5, 8:4.

11. I have the privilege of serving with Living Hope Ministries (www.livehope.org), a support group for those dealing with unwanted same-sex attractions, and the families of those who struggle. (Or who don't struggle because they are just fully immersed in a gay identity.) I mainly minister to women, for whom a history of sexual abuse has long been a common denominator.

12. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

13. Ephesians 5:3.

14. Matthew 5:28.

15. Elder, *What God Says About Sex*, 37.

16. Colossians 1:29, Ephesians 6:10.

17. Song of Solomon 5:1.

18. 1 Corinthians 7:5.

19. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 16.

20. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

21. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 17.

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# Who Told You That You Were Naked?

*Sue Bohlin reflects on God's question to Adam after he fell and broke the creation.*

There is a most interesting interaction in Genesis 3 between Adam and God after the Fall, when Adam and Eve sinned by rebelling against God's command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.  God calls to Adam, who is hiding among the trees of the Garden of Eden, "Where are you?" Adam explains, ". . . I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."

And the Lord God said, "Who told you that you were naked?" (3:11)

Hmmmm. Interesting question, one that Adam doesn't answer.

The first thing the newly fallen man tells his Creator is that he was afraid, and he was naked. Up to this point, in a literally perfect world, there was no fear, and there were no clothes. How did he know to identify this new feeling of being afraid? And "naked" is the opposite of "clothed." In a world without clothes, "naked" has no meaning, right?

When Adam says he was afraid because he was naked, my guess is that this was how he described the new, unwelcome feeling of *shame:* the horrible awareness of being very not-okay, of being vulnerable and embarrassed and exposed.

But I've been munching for days on the next question: *"Who told you that you were naked?"*

In Genesis 3:7, we read that as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, "Then the eyes of both of them opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." Apparently there was an immediate and awful awareness of a change, of something very very wrong.

(I personally think they might have been previously enveloped with light and glory. Psalm 104:2 tells us that God, who made them in His image, "covers himself with light as if it were a garment." The moment they sinned, I think they lost their light.)

But God didn't ask, "How did you know you were naked?" He asked, "*Who told you* that you were naked?"

There are only four characters in the garden: God, Adam, Eve . . . and the serpent, who we find out later is "the devil who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

So, although Adam doesn't answer God's question, it sure sounds to me like it was the nasty serpent.

And I wonder if that question is in the scriptures to direct us to pay attention to the voices that speak to us:

- Who told you that you were too much?
- Who told you that you were not enough?
- Who told you that you were fat?
- Who told you that you were ugly?
- Who told you that you were dumb?
- Who told you that you were incompetent?
- Who told you that you were a loser?
- Who told you that you were too old?
- Who told you that you were too young?

And now I'm seeing the pattern extend to the broken sexuality in our culture:

- Who told you that you were a boy in a girl's body?
- Who told you that you were gay or lesbian or bisexual?
- Who told you that you were asexual or polyamorous?

Social media has given the enemy of our souls a megaphone for his devious, destructive lies.

I thank God for His clarifying question that is just as salient today as it was the day the creation broke at the Fall: "Who told you that you were _____?" We need to look beyond the message to the WHO behind it, the source of the voice planting doubt and lies in our souls.

And instead of listening to the voice of the one whose native

tongue is lies (John 8:44), we should listen to the One who speaks loving truth to us about ourselves:

• You are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13)
• You are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14)
• You are blessed of the Father (Matthew 25:34)
• You are more valuable than many sparrows (Luke 12:7)
• You are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you (John 15:3)
• You are the branches (John 15:5)
• You are My friends (John 15:14)
• You are the called of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6)
• You are beloved of God (Romans 1:7)
• You are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you (1 Corinthians 3:16)
• You are Christ's body, and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:27)
• You are a letter of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:3)
• You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26)
• You are sons of light and sons of day (1 Thessalonians 5:5)
• You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)

Now when we hear, "Who told you that you are _____?" we can say, "YOU did, Lord! You told me in Your word!"

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/who-told-you-that-you-were-naked/](blogs.bible.org/who-told-you-that-you-were-naked/)
on November 16, 2021.

# Living With a Sense of Urgency

*“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Psalm 90:12*

*I asked my dear friend Caren Austen to write about the life-upending diagnosis that, in a single moment of time, changed absolutely everything about her life.*

Cerebral atrophy.

That was the diagnosis resulting from a recent MRI. Deterioration of the brain.

After judiciously researching the diagnosis, a consultation with a friend in the medical field confirmed the most likely cause that my brain is shrinking: Alzheimer’s. A singular moment with horrific implications.



At 66, I was stung as the future I had anticipated seemed to be snatched away. The time I likely would not have with my children and grandchildren. I didn’t feel frightened as much as sad. I know that God is Lord of my past, present, and future, so I was secure in His will and His care.

Still, I had looked forward to more time on playgrounds, more snuggles with my youngest grandchild, my only grandson, Liam, who is, at eight, now my only snuggle bug. I had anticipated

more time. Time reading books by flashlight in tents made of blankets strung over tables. More tea parties with Katrin, my tomboy who, at 11, still loves to set up fancy teas for her "Glamma." I longed to continue sending and receiving just-home-from-school and late-night texts about their days. I wanted to cook again with my budding chef, Brigid, and see how she, now a teenager, grows – where her talents and interests take her. I wanted to hang out again with Murren, riding around in the old rusty farm truck she loves. I wanted to hear more of her music video analyses. I wanted to see this young woman on the cusp of adulthood mature and launch into the world on her own. I wanted to be fully present for proms, graduations, weddings, and more babies.

I had begun two books and had fallen into the writers' bane of procrastination. Now, I wondered if I would have time, if I would still remember all I needed to complete them. Suddenly, I craved time. I wanted more. I was frustrated by the mundane necessities that took me away from the activities that screamed for my time *now*.

I had only recently experienced God's miraculous healing after decades of dealing with a debilitating mental illness that had stolen so much time. Now, with my newfound peace, freedom, and joy, I wanted to live. I wanted to walk in that freedom. I longed to wake up with delight at each new morning. I wanted to share my freedom and my healing. Now, I wondered: would there be time?

I began to live with a sense of urgency. My life became laser focused. Not on a bucket list of places to go or experiences to enjoy. Instead, I felt driven to create a legacy for my children, my grandchildren, and for my friends and others who had lived through some of the same struggles I had. Thoughts and ideas of just how to do that occupied my mind during the day when I was not at work, in the evening when I sat alone at home, and at night when I lay in bed and sleep would not come.

My priorities changed. I didn’t want to spend my money or my time on material objects or activity that would not have a lasting impact for the people I loved. I wanted to conserve my time, energy, and resources for those activities that would leave an eternal imprint on those I cared for. I began to spend even more time in prayer for those I love, especially my children and grandchildren. I began to formulate in my mind the letters I would write to each one. I began to search the Scriptures for the verses that would offer them guidance, as well as those that were precious to me, so they could get to know me better even when my mind could no longer communicate my heart.

I spent time rededicating my two daughters to God and praying my own dedication of my children’s children to Him. I told God over and over, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” longing for assurance that even when my mind was gone, I had done all I could to leave behind a legacy that would point them to the Lord I love. A legacy that would ensure we would all be reunited one day in a world that shines with the light of the glory of God when my renewed mind would know and recognize them.

I didn’t worry too much about what my own surroundings would be as I declined. I thought I would most likely be squirreled away in a nursing home that took in those with few resources. Separated by hundreds of miles from my family, I knew my local friends would come to check on me. I felt sorrow at the thought of loneliness, isolation, and limited activities, and I wondered how it would feel to live the confusion of time and place I had witnessed with my mother. I reflected on the occasions she talked to me about me, as though I were a stranger. I grieved for the time that would come when I would not recognize my own daughters whom I love, the precious gifts of God I had carried, given birth to, and reared. I wept at the thought of losing the sweet memories of mothering them and the joys that were shared only between the three of us.

As I grieved the future I thought I would not see, I began to concentrate more on what I could leave behind. As I only shared this preliminary diagnosis with a few of my closest confidants, they helped me brainstorm ideas on how to share my legacy: passages of Scripture, poetry, music, videos, letters, photo albums, etc. would be the means I would use to reach out into the future to continue influencing those God had entrusted me with and whom I would leave behind. I experienced relief, pleasure, and even hope at each new idea that would allow me to continue to have influence and share my love and myself even when the part of me that is "me" was gone.

That was how I began living a life of urgency. I awoke daily with a purpose of doing something specific to leave a legacy, a trail those I loved could follow behind me to a growing and loving relationship with God.

Then, in another singularly memorable moment, my life shifted again.

A knowledgeable neurologist examined my MRI. In view of my heart-wrenching diagnosis he seemed crazily nonplussed. But he said that, while the MRI did show evidence of mild cerebral atrophy, it was exactly what he would expect of someone who was 66 years old, and it was certainly nothing of concern. *What??!!!* In one moment he erased my fears and sent me into near spasms of joy.

Since that sweet reprieve, I must admit, I have slipped a bit in my sense of urgency. The desire to sort through stacks of books that clutter my new apartment, the necessity of making a living, the need for rest after a day or work, and countless everyday nuisances crowd my life and scream for attention. However, the experience has changed me. I no longer take my days, my hours for granted. My desire to leave a legacy of worth has changed the way I pray and spend my time. I continue to plan ways to ensure that my faith will live beyond me. I pray that God will show Himself through me in my little sphere

of influence. I have not lessened the prayers for my family, especially my daughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren. God put *me*, with all my flaws, talents, life experiences, joys, sorrows, and foibles onto this earth for a reason—a purpose that He designed *me* to fulfill. I seek to savor each moment God gives me to love and live for Him. That is my sense of urgency. It is my prayer every morning before my feet hit the floor that this day my life will not be spent in my own pursuits but will be only a conduit for Him to touch those He places in my path.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/living-with-a-sense-of-urgency/](blogs.bible.org/living-with-a-sense-of-urgency/) on August 17, 2021.

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# How Should We Think About Pride Month?

How should Christ-followers think about Pride Month?

Well, first, in case you are not aware, Pride Month is a time of highlighting and celebrating everything LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender). You might have seen a few more letters tacked on—QQIAA (queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, ally).

It’s hard NOT to notice it’s Pride Month when rainbows suddenly appear on all kinds of products and logos. Many cities have Pride marches, much of which is not safe to broadcast on the evening news because the behavior in these parades is definitely not family-friendly.

How should believers think about it all?

We need to pass our thoughts and judgments through the filter of God's word. What does God think about Pride Month?

First, every single person who is part of the LGBT community is a precious soul that He made in His image, for whom Christ died. And very few who identify as LGBT have not sustained some sort of soul wound, which makes this promise in Isaiah 42:3 even dearer: "A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice." So in terms of the individuals who participate in Pride Month, God knows each of them by name and He loves them, tenderly and great compassion.

God understands the heart cry of those in the LGBT community to belong, to be included and not excluded, to be visible and heard and understood and cared for, to hear that they matter. These are the heart desires of those who align under the Pride flag.

And God gets it, because those are legitimate desires that we all have because we're born that way. God made us that way, all of us, to long to be loved, accepted, and affirmed.

It means the world to those who have found community under the LGBT banner because they were "different," they were "other," so they often felt marginalized and ostracized from their families or school communities or religious communities.

So Pride Month is a call to love the people who celebrate it.

But that's not all.

God has also revealed His design and intention for human sexuality and gender identity, both in the Old Testament and, in the words of Jesus Himself, in the New Testament: "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave

his father and mother be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?” (Matthew 19:4-5)

God made human beings male and female. It really is that simple, regardless of how complicated people’s feelings can be about gender.

And He intended sexual expression to be limited to husband and wife within marriage, which we see by the Bible’s 44 references to sexual immorality (sex outside of marriage) as sin.

In view of the LGBT community’s desire for not just legitimacy but commendation in any and all sexual expression, we need to remember that God specifically forbade same-sex behavior in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” In the New Testament, the apostle Paul expands this prohibition to include lesbianism in Romans 1:24-27:

> Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. . . . Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men . . .

So how should Christians think about Pride Month? With discernment.

- Remembering that the people involved are precious to God, but the identity they are choosing falls short of the glory of God (the Bible’s definition of sin, Romans 3:23) because it does not submit to and align with God’s intention for human sexuality.
- Not being fooled by the slogan “Love is love,” which is a slick gloss over the false declaration that calling

something “love” automatically validates it. How about brother-sister incestuous “love”? How about adulterous “love”? How about polyamory (multiple partners in a relationship) “love”? And, especially since we have already started down the slippery slope, how long before there is a call to extend the sexual underpinnings of “love is love” to children and animals?

- Comparing one’s view of all things LGBT to God’s word. Those who identify as an Ally should ask themselves why they want to support behavior and an identity God calls sin.
- Taking seriously the sin of pride, holding two important ideas as equally important: Philippians 3:19 says those who “are proud of what they should be ashamed of” (such as those exhibiting their broken sexuality in Pride parades) are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” But Proverbs 16:5 warns, “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD.” So every single one of us needs to confess our sin of pride, of comparing ourselves to anyone else so we feel we are better than others. In fact, seeing the Pride flag during Pride Month would make a great reminder to examine ourselves to look for a prideful, judge-y heart, to confess it as sin and repent.

Many of those who have come out of homosexuality are deeply grieved by Pride Month because they know it encourages hurting, lonely, wounded people to try to find life where it can never be found. They know the truth of Jeremiah 2:13, where God says,

> “For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me— the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!”

How should a Christian think about Pride Month? With compassion and prayer for those caught in it, that they will

turn to Jesus as the fountain of living water. And with humility for ourselves, to repent of any pride that comes from comparing ourselves to those waving rainbow flags. As Billy Graham said, “Never take credit for not falling into a temptation that never tempted you in the first place.”

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/how-should-we-think-about-pride-month/ on June 15, 2021.

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# The Commencement Address I Actually Got to Give

*In 2014, I wrote a blog post The Commencement Address I’ll Never Get to Give.*

*Then I was deeply honored to be asked to address the eight graduating seniors of the Richardson Home School Association, where my husband and I have been teaching. He’s the high school science teacher and I am his admin, I teach cursive handwriting to younger kids, and together we teach “Building Confident Christians,” a faith-building year of worldview and apologetics.*

*I had already written my address as a blog post, but I tweaked it some, coming in at a very-short-for-me nine minutes (because ain’t nobody goes to graduation for the commencement address, right?):*

We’ve taught all eight of you, and I love you! Congratulations! You made it to the cap-and-gown stage. Not without a lot of help and prodding and prayers and frustration from your parents though, right? Thank them. There’s not a

single thing you are or do or have that they didn't have a part in. Thank them! I mean, right now! Stand up, wave and say thank you! (I'll wait . . .!)

You've just finished many years of schooling, and along the way you may have picked up some hooey from the surrounding culture about how wonderful and special you are because of some well-meaning self-esteem messaging. You may have thrown away dozens of ribbons or trophies you received just for showing up.{1}

Those days are over, because that was never real life. Self-esteem and self-confidence are only gained one way, the hard way: working hard to meet a challenge and not give up until you succeed. You earn self-confidence by doing, not by reciting platitudes in a mirror.

I'd like to put on a life-coach hat for a minute and make some suggestions for your post-high-school life.

Most of you just finished Dr. Bohlin's and my class, Building Confident Christians. We had you do a lot of reading for that class. I want to encourage you to read something else.

If you haven't read Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, read it. It's a classic of how to understand people and how they like to be treated. The reason it's so true is that the book fleshes out the second great commandment, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

For example, when you see a service person, like a waitstaff or toll booth attendant, call him or her by name. One's name is the sweetest sound on earth to each person, and service personnel are often treated as if they were invisible. Using someone's name says, "You are not invisible to me, and I honor you for your service." Prospective employees and spouses have been known to disqualify themselves because of the way they treated people with disrespect or contempt when out in public.

Everyone has an invisible tattoo on their forehead that says, “Please encourage me.” And most people have an invisible speech bubble over their heads that says, “Do I matter? Please show me I matter.” Every single person you will ever meet is infinitely valuable as the handcrafted masterpiece of the Creator God, and they deserve to be honored and respected simply because God made them and He loves them.

Some final pithy words to the wise. . .

Listen to your body. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, and it will tell you what it needs. Especially listen to your body when it tells you it needs sleep, and green vegetables.

Learn to recognize the nudges of the Holy Spirit, and follow them.

Pray for your future spouse. Assume that you don’t know who they are right now, statistically speaking. He or she is out there somewhere. Your prayers WILL make a difference. (Afterwards, you can ask Dr. Bohlin and me about what that means.{2})

Don’t believe everything you think. You swim in the polluted waters of a culture that has rejected God and biblical values, and some of those ideas and thoughts have crept into your mind, even though you weren’t aware of it.

Plus, Satan and the demons are real, and you live on the battlefield of unrelenting spiritual warfare. You shouldn’t believe everything you think because one of the enemy’s favorite tactics is to whisper in our ears in first person, so we think these ideas are our own. Such as,

- “It’s okay, I can do this, no one will know.”
- “I deserve to get my way.”
- “I am such a loser.”
- “Well, I’m better than HER/HIM.”

Whether we're talking about the cultural water you swim in, or the thoughts in your head that come from spiritual warfare, pass everything through the filter of God's word. Which means you need to read and study it! Every day!

If you wonder if you should be doing something, you probably shouldn't. If the thought, 'Should I be doing this?' even enters your head, it's an alarm. Invite the Lord into that question!

A few minutes ago I asked you to stand up and thank your parents. One of the most important habits you can ever form is gratitude. Especially toward God. He is continually blessing you with everything from the ability to draw your next breath, to your ability to remember your name, to your ability to walk or drive or think or talk or get a job or more education.

Get in the habit of thanking Him for all those things. Regularly stop and ask yourself, "What would I really miss tomorrow if I didn't give thanks for it today?"-and then thank the Lord for it. Right where you're sitting-"Oh Lord! Thank You for cushioned seats! Thank You for 24/7 electricity! Thank You for air conditioning! Thank You for clean drinking water! Thank You for paved roads, and garbage pickup! There are so many things we would really miss tomorrow if we didn't give thanks for them today.

A grateful heart is not a complaining heart.

A grateful heart is not a critical heart.

A grateful heart is not an entitled heart.

Believe me, it will make you a much better person to live with, or work with, or play with, or just be with.




One of the best ways to get in the habit of saying “Thank You, Lord” is a gratitude journal. It’s a wonderful discipline to record three things every day (or night) where you saw God being gracious and loving and kind to you, or to someone else. I want to make that easy for you, so I have a gift for each of you, a personalized gratitude journal. I challenge you, over the next few years, fill it up, one day at a time. What a magnificent form of worship that would be!

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and give you peace. Your real education is about to begin.

1. After the graduation, I was humbled and grateful for the comments of the mother of an intellectual disabled child who pointed out that her daughter loves receiving ribbons and trophies for just showing up. It makes her feel valued and loved. I’m thankful for this perspective and I regret that my words caused needless pain.
2. Soon after I trusted Christ in college, I started praying every day for my future husband. Once I met Ray and realized he was the one God had chosen for me, we discovered that he had started having a daily quiet time of Bible study and prayer the same week I started to pray.

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# What Does It Mean To Live

# With an Eternal Perspective?

*Sue Bohlin, who has been working on developing an eternal perspective for decades, provides some examples of how to do that.*

Years ago, after spending his whole life on the mission field, a career missionary made his final trip home on a passenger ship. One of the other people on his sailing was a celebrity, and as the ship made its way into the harbor, all those on board beheld a huge throng of well wishers at the pier with signs and instruments to celebrate the famous person's return.

The missionary stood at the railing, watching wistfully, knowing that not a soul was there for him. He said, "Lord, I've served You my whole life. Look at all the recognition and revelry for that famous person, and there's nobody here for me. It hurts, Lord."

He heard the still, small voice say, "You're not home yet, son."

I love this story that helps me keep in mind the big picture that includes the eternal, unseen realm, and the long picture that extends into the forever that awaits on the other side of death.

But how do we *get* an eternal perspective?

## Seeing the Unseen

As I've grown older, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 has become my new life verse:

> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For

> the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

We have to work at seeing the unseen and eternal. We do that with the eyes of our hearts. We do that by training ourselves to view everything through the lens of God's word.

I've been working at developing an eternal perspective for years. For me, it's about connecting the dots between earthly things and heavenly things.

I look at earthly things and wonder, "How does this connect to the spirit realm? How does this connect to what is unseen and eternal?" (For examples, look at Glorious Morning Glories, Back Infections and Heart Infections, Cruise Ships, Roller Coasters and Attitudes, and Blowing Past Greatness.)

Jesus' parables are the world's best examples of using the physical to provide understanding of the eternal. He was always connecting the dots between the things He was surrounded by—different types of soil, lost coins and sheep and sons, a wedding banquet—and explaining how these things related to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Another aspect of seeing the unseen is staying aware of the fact that we live in a permanent battle zone of spiritual warfare. We have an enemy who hates us because He hates God, and is continually attacking us with lies and deceptions. When we forget that we live in a culture barraging us with anti-God anti-truth, it's like going out in our underwear, needlessly exposing ourselves. Living with an eternal perspective means staying vigilant, donning our spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:10-18) and using it to fight back against the lies of the enemy.

One of the most important prayers we can ask is, "Lord, help me see Your hand at work"—and then intentionally looking for it. For years I have kept a "God Sightings" Journal where I record evidence of God intervening in my life and the lives of

others I have seen. I love to ask my friends and mentees, “Do you have any God Sightings to share?” to help them identify the hand of God in their lives.

One final aspect of seeing the unseen is to remind ourselves that everything we can see, is going away. Everything we can see and measure is temporary and passing. So we need to think about what’s around us that is permanent and eternal, and invest in those things.

God.

People.

God’s word.

God’s work in people’s lives.

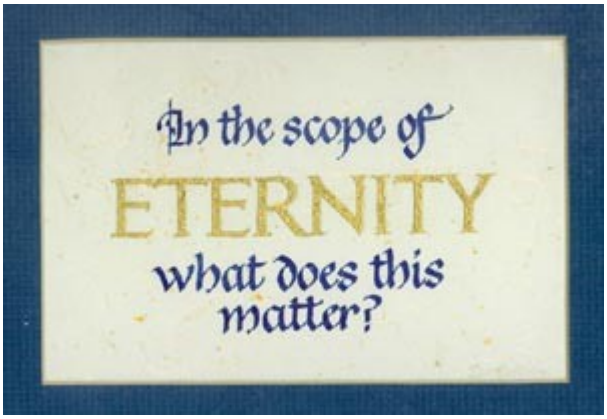
And the things we do to honor God and bless others. Randy Alcorn writes, “With eternity in view, nearly any honest activity-whether building a shed, driving a bus, pruning trees, changing diapers or caring for a patient-can be an investment in God’s kingdom.”

One of my friends is a TSA agent. She diligently reminds herself daily that every traveler who comes through the security line is infinitely valuable because they are made in the image of God, and Jesus died for them. She showers kindness on them because they are so important. One of her co-workers, for whom work is just a job where he punches a time clock, told her, “In two years you’ll stop being nice to everyone.” We don’t think so. She works at maintaining an eternal perspective, seeing the unseen, to the glory of God.

## Remembering the Long View

Another aspect of living with an eternal perspective is focusing on the reality that our time on earth is short, especially compared to the never-ending life on the other side of death.

Another one of my favorite questions is to ask, “A hundred years from now, when you are face to face with Jesus in heaven, what do you want to be glad you chose today? Indulging your flesh and doing whatever you think will make you happy, or making choices that honor God and bless other people?”




Several years ago I wrote a blog post about one of the power tools for our “life tool belt” that remains an essential part of my eternal perspective: passing everything through the grid of the great question, “In the scope of eternity, what does this matter?”

In the decades since I started asking that question, it’s still the best filter for deciding what’s worth getting upset about, and what to let go, and what to just roll over into the Lord’s hands.

Moses was very helpful for helping us develop an eternal perspective. He writes in Psalm 90:10, “Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures.” So we need to be sober about how much time we actually have. Then he writes a great prayer in verse 12 that helps us remember the long view: “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

So I did.

As of today, I have lived 24,500 days.

If I live to be 70, I have only 1,050 days left.

If I live to be 80, I have only 4,700 days left.

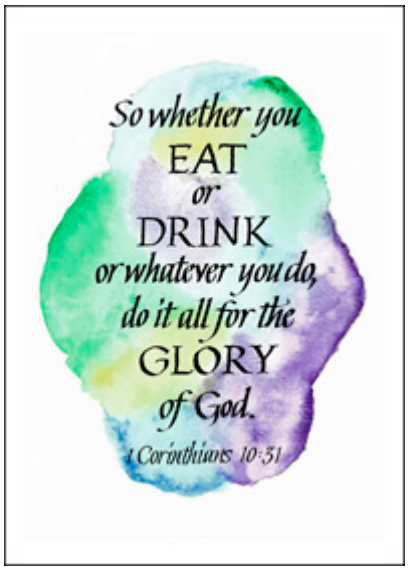
Oh my word, I have so much earthly work to do in a very short time, before my life continues on the other side! And I so want to grow older well.

One way to do that is to pre-decide now that we will use our earthly days fully, engaged in ministry, as long as God gives us breath.

Years ago, my view of living with an eternal perspective was shaped by a lady who decided to start college in her 70s. When they asked her why she would do such a thing when her life was basically over, she said, “Oh no! It’s not over! I’m preparing for the next part of my life in heaven! The more equipped I can get on earth, the more ready I’ll be for what the Lord has for me on the other side!”

Another lady was homebound because she was so disabled. She got the word out that every afternoon, her home was open for anyone who needed prayer. Some days it was like there was a revolving door, so many coming and going! She had a vibrant ministry in the waning days of her life because she was determined to use her remaining earthly days fully, to the glory of God.

In the time you have now, live well. To the glory of God. Keep reminding yourself that everything we do now has an eternal impact. Our choices, our behaviors, our words, ripple into eternity. Which is why we need to seek to do everything for the glory of God.




I lettered this calligraphy and put it in a frame in my kitchen next to the coffee maker so I see it and recite it to myself every morning.

Two great questions to consider: “Lord, in order to live well, in order to live to Your glory, with an eternal perspective, what do You want me to do less of in the time I have left? And what do You want me to do more of?”

As a mom of littles, Nicole Johnson was feeling sorry for herself when she met with a friend who had just returned from Europe. She writes,

“My friend turned to me with a beautifully wrapped package, and said, ‘I brought you this.’ It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe. I wasn’t exactly sure why she’d given it to me until I read her inscription: ‘With admiration for the greatness of what you are building when no one sees.’

“In the days ahead I would read—no, devour—the book. And I would discover what would become for me, four life-changing truths, after which I could pattern my work:

“1) No one can say who built the great cathedrals—we have no record of their names.
2) These builders gave their whole lives for a work they would never see finished.

3) They made great sacrifices and expected no credit.
4) The passion of their building was fueled by their faith that the eyes of God saw everything.

“There’s a story in the book about a rich man who came to visit the cathedral while it was being built, and he saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, ‘Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof? No one will ever see it.’

“And the workman replied, ‘Because God sees it.'”

Living with an eternal perspective as we make choices and invest our time to glorify God is like building a cathedral that we won’t be able to see finished.

But every “next faithful step” of the tasks in your life, is building something. The things you do that no one sees but God—the unseen and eternal—they matter!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/what-does-it-mean-to-live-with-an-eternal-perspective/ on March 17, 2021.

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# Glorious Morning Glories

This is what love looks like.

My husband planted morning glories for me on our back fence because they are my favorite.

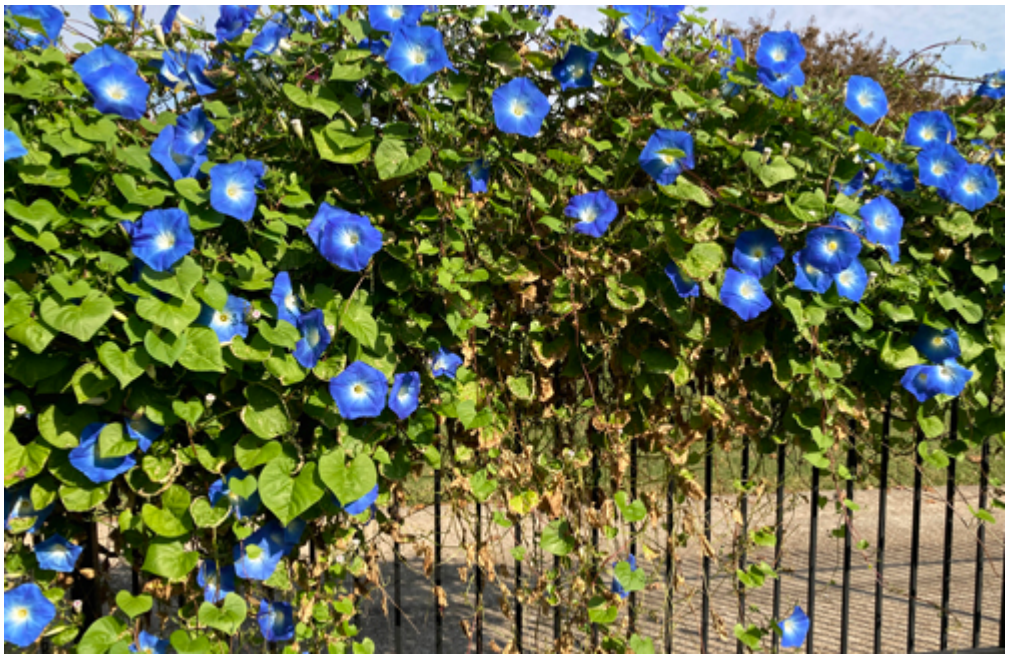


I love that a whole new batch of brand new blooms pops out each morning, day after day of fresh beauty that reminds me of Lamentations 3:23, that God's mercies are "new every morning—great is Your faithfulness!"

This year, we had to wait long into the fall for the flowers. The green foliage was crazy lush and full for months, but there were no gorgeous "blue happies," as I think of them, until late October.

Finally they started exploding daily with beauty and color. Not long afterwards, an unseasonable cold snap hit us, and the green foliage started to wither and dry up.

But the "blue happies" kept popping out!



I had to smile at what was happening on our fence, because it was a powerful illustration of what it's like for me to grow older. The green leaves were getting old and spent and dry and yucky, at the same time that every morning, there were still fresh and new morning glory blooms sprouting out. What a picture of what has become my new life verse, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18—

> Therefore we do not lose heart, but ***though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day***. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

My body is growing older and weaker, especially ravaged by the lingering effects of polio. Not long ago, I spent almost two years unable to walk at all because of severe arthritis in both hips. (The Lord has restored so very much to me on the other side of two hip replacements!) I'm able to walk and stand without pain these days, for which I give thanks every single day, but the march of time continues and, like everyone else, I'm going downhill physically.

But—the glorious but!—on the inside I get to be fresh and new every day! Just like the "blue happies"! As I walk in faithfulness with the Lord, seeking to abide in Him and allow the beauty and character of Christlikeness to flow into and through me, He keeps bringing renewed energy and joy to my soul. Every day! I love it!

The hope for us as believers, especially older believers, is that we get to be renewed daily with the radiance and vibrancy and joy of Jesus within that keeps getting better and better the older we get!

In fact, the Bible even speaks about our transformation as a special kind of glory: 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 says,

> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

I LOVE being transformed, a little bit every day, into the image of Jesus, with ever-increasing glory! I get to be a spiritual morning glory!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/glorious-morning-glories/ on December 15, 2020.

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# Invisible Women

*Sue Bohlin addresses the call for the church to meet the needs of single moms and those widowed by death, divorce, desertion,*

*and imprisonment.*

The other morning at church, I was talking to one of our church leaders as he spotted one of our three-year-olds making a run for the lobby. He called the boy's name three times, including extending his hand for a high-five, and was ignored all three times. (I'm a boy mom. I get it. The little guy was completely focused on escaping the worship center—no room for any other thoughts!) Laughing, I asked my friend, "Hey, how are you doing with that 'feeling invisible' thing?"

He was fine with it. But there are a number of people in our churches for whom feeling invisible is no laughing matter. It hurts.

A few days later, I was privileged to teach on 1 Timothy 5, where Paul gives Timothy direction on caring well for the widows in his congregation. In preparing for my message, I learned that in the first century, "widow" referred to a much larger group of women than just those whose husbands had died.

Widows could be women who had lost husbands through death, divorce, desertion, or imprisonment. (We have all four of those in our church.) They could even be women whose polygamist husbands had come to faith in Christ and learned that God's plan for marriage is one man and one woman, and they sent all but one wife away. Widows could also refer to unmarried women; the sense of "widow" in the first century was a "without-a-man woman." And of course in that time, when women had so few rights and privileges, that was a scary situation.

Paul's instruction to Timothy on superintending the care of widows resonates with how important vulnerable women are to God. The Old Testament has 32 references to widows or widows and orphans! If God says something once it's important . . . but THIRTY-TWO TIMES??!! In the New Testament, the Lord's brother James sums up this Old Testament value, defining true

religion as caring for widows and orphans in their distress (1:27).

How should the church care for vulnerable women today? The ones who can easily feel invisible in the church?

One group we need to take better care of is single moms.

I asked my dear friend, a single mom, about her experience. She was grateful for the ways in which a few people from her church stepped in to provide physically in various ways:

- A new friend brought her son to the hospital when she was suddenly admitted, and then cared for him until she was discharged.
- They mowed her lawn
- Some folks gave her a break by taking her son for a few hours to several days
- One especially memorable year, a man took her son to the store to get my friend her one and only Mother's Day gift

But she was always plagued by a constant longing—for belonging, for protection and help, for men to provide balance to her over-protective feminine mothering.

- She longed for a healthy family to draw them into their home and invite them for meals and family times together so they could see what "healthy" and "loving" and "respectful" looked like.
- She longed for a man to invest in her son so he could see how the boy treated his mom and take him aside to say, "Hey buddy, it's not OK to talk to your mom that way."
- She longed for a family to say, "Come spend Christmas with us" so it wasn't just her and her son alone with the Christmas tree—again.

In addition to relational needs, many single moms have needs

for practical assistance concerning their homes and cars. And another group of "invisible women" with the same kinds of needs are older single women.

Typical practical needs:

- Help with assembling furniture such as from Ikea
- Trimming trees and other kinds of yard work
- Home repair
- Changing out-of-reach light bulbs
- Winterizing (and then summerizing) a house
- Organizing a closet, room, or garage
- Changing the oil in the car
- Moving stuff (both to a new home and just moving heavy furniture in the house)
- Plumbing help such as installing a new faucet, fixing a dripping faucet or running toilet
- Installing a ceiling fan
- Grocery shopping
- Rides to the doctor, chemo appointments, tests, surgeries and procedures
- Babysitting and carting kids places they need to go
- Helping with budgeting and financial direction
- Meals: home-cooked and delivered, gift cards to restaurants

Just as in the church at Ephesus when Paul was helping Timothy love his people well, we need to connect those with needs, with the people gifted to serve. Or even those without supernatural giftings for service, but a generous, Christlike heart to love others. That's how the church cares for its own.

So they don't feel invisible.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/invisible-women/ on October 25, 2020.

# On Suicide

*The incidence of depression, anxiety, and suicide has skyrocketed as the isolation and life-disruption from Covid-19 has ravaged our world. I wrote this post in April 2013, but it's even more salient today.*

Over the weekend, Rick Warren (pastor of Saddleback Church in California, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*) and his wife Kay revealed that their son Matthew had taken his life after a lifelong struggle with mental illness. In an email to his church, Pastor Warren wrote, "[O]nly those closest knew that he struggled from birth with mental illness, dark holes of depression, and even suicidal thoughts. In spite of America's best doctors, meds, counselors, and prayers for healing, the torture of mental illness never subsided."

Many years ago, I was privileged to take a three-year lay counseling class from a wise and experienced man who taught us that those who commit suicide don't really want to die; they just want the pain to end. Deep depression feels like being locked in a dark dungeon with no way out. The pain can become intolerably intense; one friend likened it to being forced to hold a large cauldron of boiling liquid with no hot pads. Those of us who have been spared from deep depression cannot really imagine how dark and how painful it is.

Psalm 139:16 says, "All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be." That means that before God even creates us, He knows the day of our death. That also means that those who commit suicide are dying on their ordained last day. Most of the time, though, God intervenes in people's plans to end their lives, each story different and drenched in grace.

When one teenage girl learned she was pregnant, she planned to drive one of her family's cars into an embankment at the end of the week-but her parents sold that car before she could carry out her plan, and she decided she couldn't wreck the one remaining vehicle. Today, she is so glad she gave birth to her baby girl, who brought immeasurable joy to her adoptive parents, and enjoys her life of service to God which includes her own family.

Another friend lay in bed one night planning to end her life by walking out in front of an 18-wheeler on the nearby interstate. As she thought about making her way in her nightgown across the empty field that lay between her house and the highway, she suddenly thought, "I can't walk across that field in my bare feet!" . . . and turned over and went back to sleep.

When our son was suicidally depressed in high school, his friend came to us and told us of his plan to hurt himself a few days later. He was not pleased that his friend had "betrayed" him, but we were so grateful-and it enabled us to get him some badly-needed help.

There are so many stories of God's intervention that when we do hear of someone taking their own life, I do believe it means God allowed it because it was their ordained day. This doesn't diminish the pain for the survivors, though.

My dear friend Caren Austen, responding to the news of Matthew Warren's suicide, wrote an essay revealing her own struggles with mental illness and suicidal depression so that people would know what it's like. With her permission, I gratefully share these excerpts:

> "I am not weak, lacking in faith, demon-possessed or oppressed or anything else but suffering from faulty brain chemistry.
>
> "The disorder affects my daily life: my ability to work,

interact with other people, activities of daily living to the point of sometimes being unable to get out of bed or leave my house. I hate it. I hate that God has chosen this path for my growth and sanctification. Depression is my nearly constant companion. I rarely get a break. I wake up with it. I work with it. I go to sleep with it, knowing that tomorrow I'll wake up and live it all over again.

"There are so many of us who suffer silently, because it is not acceptable to discuss mental illness. Cancer is OK. People have sympathy and understanding for that. Cystic Fibrosis, diabetes, MS and the multitude of other terrible diseases and disorders are acceptable. Mental illness is considered taboo. The stigma attached to it prevents people from getting the help they need, from picking up the phone, from asking for prayer.

"Many, many people, especially Christians, negatively judge people with mental illness and especially those who have made the awful decision to take their own lives. A common statement is: 'It's the ultimate selfish act.' I'd ask you to consider what agony any individual must be enduring to fight every natural instinct for survival to choose instead to die. To be feeling psychic pain so incredible that the very thought of even one more moment is unendurable. I have, in the past, been completely and thoroughly convinced that if I loved my family, especially my children, as I said I did, I would remove the evil (me) from their lives, so I would no longer influence them for evil.

"These are the kinds of thoughts that people who choose suicide experience. They are not to be judged harshly. They are to be seen with compassion. Yes, it is an unspeakable tragedy that leaves those left behind with the worst kind of pain. A pain that I can't even imagine as they believe that the one who died didn't love them enough to fight. I know those are the thoughts, the feelings of those left behind, but they are not the actual reasons suicide was chosen. In

> fact, just the opposite is likely true. The one who chooses suicide often does it out of love for those they care most about, as strange as that may seem.”

Please, please pray for the Warren family and for all those teetering on the edge of suicide. God knows who they are. It may even be someone you know and love.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/on_suicide/](blogs.bible.org/on_suicide/).