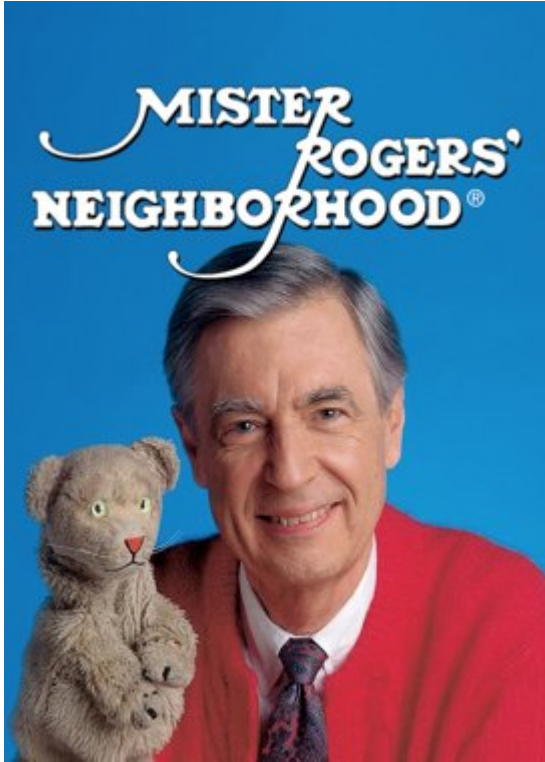


Mister Rogers and the Hunger for God



"You've made this day a special day by just your being you. There is no person in the whole world like you, and I like you just the way you are." *—Mister Rogers, to every person as we watched his show.*

With the news that a documentary about Fred Rogers (Public Television's "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood") will be released this summer, and a movie about him starring Tom Hanks will be in production soon, there has been a good bit of buzz in social media recently. I keep coming across articles about him and links to videos that often move me to grateful tears for this amazing man.

"Mister Rogers" had a heart for children that is unlike anything I've ever seen. His TV program ran for 33 years, from 1968 to 2001. My children grew up watching Mister Rogers, and I often sat with them, equally enthralled by his gentleness, his predictable routines (such as changing out of his jacket into a cardigan sweater and a different pair of shoes *every single show*), and his ability to speak straight to the heart of the audience. Except it wasn't that we were part of his audience; Mister Rogers communicated in such a powerfully

personal way, with such soothing, calm tranquility, that we knew he was speaking to US. Individually.

Even before I learned he was an ordained Presbyterian minister, I sensed there was something deeply spiritual about his message and the way he communicated respect, genuine caring, and encouragement to his “neighbors.” As Jonathan Merritt wrote in *The Atlantic*,

“Fred’s faith surfaced in subtle, indirect ways that most viewers might miss, but it infused all he did. He [believed](#) ‘the space between the television set and the viewer is holy ground,’ but he trusted God to do the heavy lifting. The wall of his office featured a framed [picture](#) of the Greek word for ‘grace,’ a constant reminder of his [belief](#) that he could use television ‘for the broadcasting of grace through the land.’ Before entering that office each day, Rogers would pray, “Dear God, let some word that is heard be yours.”[\[1\]](#)

I once heard a wise man say that since we are made in the image of God, everything we do and say either tells the truth about God, or it tells a lie about God. It seems to me that Fred Rogers showed millions of children what Father God is like. I am especially reminded of God’s own statement about Himself in Exodus 34:6:

The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth . . .

For decades, Mister Rogers demonstrated **compassion**: for people with different skin than his, for people with disabilities, for people going through hard times, and especially by showing unrelenting respect for children—their fears (such as haircuts and being sucked down the bathtub drain) and their pains (like divorce), and their celebrations.

Grace was a huge part of Mister Rogers’ worldview. He bestowed dignity and value on everyone because of his belief that all people deserve dignity and appreciation as God’s creations,

made in His image. Who know how many little hearts God healed through the song “It’s You I Like”? In fact, when Joan Rivers had him as a guest on the Tonight Show, you can see grace wash over her like the warm blessing that it was:

God is **slow to anger**, and His servant Mister Rogers showed an amazing degree of patience and self-control in his shows. He always moved and spoke slowly and deliberately, as an antidote to the barrage of “Hurry up, hurry up!” children often hear from their frazzled, impatient caregivers.

God **abounds in lovingkindness and truth**, and apparently so did Mister Rogers. One of his quotes:

“There are three ways to ultimate success:

The first way is to be kind.

The second way is to be kind.

The third way is to be kind.”

This is a great quote, but countless people report that Fred Rogers *lived* it. He was the epitome of kindness—to everyone. One journalist reported a typical scene when he walked on the streets of New York:

“. . .but every time [the show’s producer Margy Whitmer] turned around, there was Mister Rogers putting his arms around someone, or wiping the tears off someone’s cheek, or passing around the picture of someone’s child, or getting on his knees to talk to a child. Margy couldn’t stop them, and she couldn’t stop him. “Oh, Mister Rogers, thank you for my childhood.” “Oh, Mister Rogers, you’re the father I never had.” “Oh, Mister Rogers, would you please just hug me?”

[\[2\]](#)

In the wake of the #metoo movement, ugly truths are emerging about certain celebrities. It’s good to be able to highlight one of the good guys, who shone his light to the glory of God as he nourished the souls of millions of children and anyone

else who watched his TV show.

I think we are all hungry to know that we are loved, especially by God. I look forward to meeting him in heaven one day. I will close with this story I found on Facebook that powerfully expresses Mister Rogers' legacy:

"A good portion of my pro-bono work is defending abused children. It's a cause close to my heart. In the course of my work I met a man who was an adult survivor. You wouldn't have known it looking at him. He was this gigantic Polynesian guy. Wild curly hair. I think of him every time I see Khal Drogo on GoT. He was counseling some of the little kids, and doing a fantastic job of it.

"I visited his home to get his opinion on something and I noticed a little toy on his desk. It was Trolley. Naturally curious, I asked him about it. This is what he told me:

"The most dangerous time for me was in the afternoon when my mother got tired and irritable. Like clockwork. Now, she liked to beat me in discreet places so my father wouldn't see the bruises. That particular day she went for the legs. Not uncommon for her. I was knocked down and couldn't get back up. Also not uncommon. She gave me one last kick, the one I had come to learn meant 'I'm done now'. Then she left me there upstairs, face in the carpet, alone. I tried to get up, but couldn't. So I dragged myself, arm over arm, to the television, climbed up the tv cabinet and turned on the TV.

"And there was Mr. Rogers. It was the end of the show and he was having a quiet, calm conversation with those hundreds of kids. In that moment, he seemed to look me in the eye when he said 'And I like you just for being you'. In that moment, it was like he was reaching across time and space to say these words to me when I needed them most.

"It was like the hand of God, if you're into that kind of thing. It hit me in the soul. I was a miserable little kid.

I was sure I was a horrible person. I was sure I deserved every last moment of abuse, every blow, every bad name. I was sure I earned it, sure I didn't deserve better. I *knew* all of these things ... until that moment. If this man, who I hadn't even met, liked me just for being me, then I couldn't be all bad. Then maybe someone could love me, even if it wasn't my mom.

“‘It gave me hope. If that nice man liked me, then I wasn't a monster. I was worth fighting for. From that day on, his words were like a secret fortress in my heart. No matter how broken I was, no matter how much it hurt or what was done to me, I could remember his words, get back on my feet, and go on for another day.

“‘That's why I keep Trolley there. To remind me that, no matter how terrible things look, someone who had never met me liked me just for being me, and that makes even the worst day worth it to me. I know how stupid it sounds, but Mr. Rogers saved my life.’

“The next time I saw him, he was talking to one of my little clients. When they were done with their session, he helped her out of her chair, took both of her hands, looked her in the eyes and said: ‘And remember, I like you just for being you.’

“That, to me, is Mr. Rogers' most powerful legacy. All of the little lives he changed and made better with simple and sincere words of love and kindness.”

1.

www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/mister-rogers-saint/416838/

2.

www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a27134/can-you-say-hero-esq1198/

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/mister_rogers_and_the_hunger_for_god
on May 1, 2018.

Why Every Christian Student Needs Mind Games

You've probably heard or read that the vast majority of young Christians are leaving the church after they graduate from high school. But they don't have to "graduate from God" after they get their diploma.

There are several reasons young adults leave the church, and many of them jettison their faith as well. The biggest reason is that their questions and doubts—which started in junior high school—were not answered by their parents or youth leaders.

Another reason is that they don't believe Christianity is true. Immersed in a cultural brine of religious lies and deceptions, they don't know what the truth is and why biblical Christianity blows the false ideas and religions away.

A third reason is that they caught their unbiblical beliefs and practices from their parents and other adults in the church. It turns out that Mom and Dad were almost as pickled in the cultural brine as their kids!

But Probe offers a great way to push back on these reasons.

Our summer [Mind Games](#) camp is a total-immersion, life-changing week of instruction in worldview and apologetics designed to build students' confidence that Christianity is true, and why

Christianity is true. We lay the foundation of three major worldviews to give them understanding of how other people think and why Christianity is better because it matches reality. Then we teach them why they can be sure that God exists, why the Bible can be trusted, and how we can know that Jesus is God and the only way to heaven.

After these basics, campers learn how biblical principles apply to issues they need to grapple with: truth and grace about LGBT, how faith and science work together, why a good God allows pain and evil, the value of suffering, how to watch a movie with their brains turned on, genetic engineering, understanding Islam, and more.

But it's not just lectures. Plenty of free time is built into the schedule for processing what they've learned and developing friendships with other campers. The relationships that students form at Mind Games is one of their biggest takeaways. With a max of 40 participants, everyone can enjoy connecting to other campers, and many of the friendships endure year after year.

The biggest reason for leaving the church is unanswered questions and doubts. Probe staffers assure students that Mind Games is a safe place to ask any question—anonously—and address any doubt. Many of the questions campers come with, are answered during the week in our lectures and discussion times. Whether in large group or the many opportunities for one-on-one conversations with Probe teachers, campers have many ways to get help wrestling with obstacles to their faith.

For over twenty years, Mind Games alumni have grown into leaders on campus, in public service, in the military, and in the church. The fruit of their time with us is “fruit that lasts” (John 15:16).

Mind Games Camp 2026 is June 14-20 at Camp Copass in Denton, Texas, in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. Some scholarships are

available. Check out videos and much more information at Probe.org/mindgames.

Can you think of a high school student who doesn't need Mind Games?

We can't either.

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What It's Like to Live with a Disability



As a polio survivor since I was an infant, living with a disability has been my “normal.” But, like most polio survivors, I just gritted through the limitations and inconveniences, trying to keep up with everyone else.

I've been thankful for the opportunities to speak to children about what it's like to live with first a limp, and now the need for a scooter to get around, as several months ago I stopped being able to walk. My favorite thing to tell them is, “I am not my polio leg. I am *me*. You connect with me by looking in my eyes. When you see someone in a wheelchair,

please look in their eyes, because that's where the person *is*."

In a world of increasing bullying and growing coldness toward other people, and in the hope of allowing compassion to grow, I'm hoping that you might find it helpful to know what it's like to live with a disability. My disability is physical; I don't really know what it's like to live with an emotional disability, or an intellectual disability, or even a physical disability that is invisible but all-too-painfully real, such as deafness, cystic fibrosis, or debilitating pain. But some things are still true across the board.

In no particular order, here are some things I hope you find helpful in order to show more grace to folks like me.

Everything takes longer. The smallest personal care chores, like showering and getting dressed, or even fixing a cup of coffee, are harder and they consume time. (I'm still learning this, and apparently I'm a slow learner because I'm so optimistic by nature that I keep forgetting how long things really take.)

Life is permeated with frustration. On my first flight after losing the ability to walk, the American Airlines software wouldn't let the gate agent change my seat from the back of the plane. Strapped into an aisle seat that barely clears the arm rests of row after row of fellow passengers, being taken to my seat was hard. And embarrassing.

Obstacles abound. In a wheelchair or scooter, barriers like stairs and sand proclaim, "You can't go here."

Social activities are restricted. If a building isn't handicap-friendly (and having just two steps is enough to do that), there's no point even to trying to attend. Things are much better in the U.S with the Americans With Disabilities Act, but I won't ever be able to travel to Belarus again; the former Soviet states are so handicap-hostile that you almost

never see a soul in a wheelchair. Many just don't leave their home.

People stare. Children are (quite understandably) curious about anything and anyone different, but still, the stares from both kids and adults silently shout, "You don't fit in. What's wrong with you? You're a freak."

Am I invisible? On the other end of the spectrum, it's amazing how few people will make eye contact with someone in a wheelchair or scooter. *Hey! I'm still here! Ready to interact with you!* Sometimes, waiters ignore patrons with a disability, not even asking for their order.

Extreme weather is a nightmare. Rain and snow are enemies of mobility equipment, especially anything with electronics. I lost my first scooter to rain in Cozumel. [That was hard](#), losing my only means of mobility in a foreign country.

Bathrooms. Many bathrooms don't have stalls big enough for a wheelchair or scooter. In private homes, bathroom doorways aren't wide enough to get through. I'm sure you can imagine what a challenge that presents!

It's expensive. The tools and assistance we need are not cheap: walkers, canes, grab bars, widened doorways, raised toilets, and ramps—not to mention wheelchairs and scooters—are costly. You probably can't guess the price tag on an adapted car or van that allows a disabled person to drive.

Losses. We are continually facing the next "one more thing" we used to be able to do. And it hurts.

Other people's self-centeredness. I love to cruise; it's a perfect vacation for mobility-challenged people. But it is just staggering how many people will wait with me for an elevator and then rush inside to claim their place. It literally only takes a few seconds for an elevator to fill with too many people for there to be room for my scooter.

Naturally, no one will look at me until the doors close.

May I make some suggestions for responding to those of us with disabilities?

Please don't . . .

Please don't try to fix us or shame us for being where we are. Some people have been asked, "What's the prognosis for _____?" When told it's progressive, some people have heard, "Well, it will be as long as that's your attitude!"

Please don't "help" us without asking. Some people have been grabbed by the arm to steer them or attempt to give support. I've had taxi drivers suggest that I shift my weight to my barely-functioning polio leg because it made sense to them. Please, just let me figure out what I need to do to make things work.

Please don't assume it's God's will to heal everyone this side of heaven. If that were so, Paul would not have been given his thorn in the flesh and told God's grace was enough, and His power is perfected in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12)

Please don't assume our disability is because of unconfessed sin. Plenty of us have asked, "What did I do wrong?" and God, one way or another, has given us John 9 grace. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." (John 9:3)

Please don't try to explain what God is up to. Nobody knows the specifics of God's plan to bring good to us (and our families, and our friends) and glory to Himself. Let's just trust His goodness and give up on offering explanations.

Please don't try to make us feel better about our disability. Don't start any sentence with the words, "At least . . ." It's not comforting. It's minimizing.

But please do stay sensitive to God's leading on how to

encourage us. One of my pastors asked me if I'd like to run a marathon with him in heaven, when we'll both have healthy, strong resurrection bodies. Now that was encouraging! Several friends have asked, "Would you allow me to bless you by bringing your family a meal?" (Then they affirmed me for not giving into my old pattern of "Oh, I've got this, thanks" independence.)

Please do let us know if you see Jesus shining through us. Many of us deeply, desperately want the difficulties and suffering of living with a disability to be sculpting in us "an eternal weight of glory, far beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

And please do smile when you make eye contact with us.

Because we're not invisible.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_its_like_to_live_with_a_disability on March 6, 2018.

Oprah: America's Beloved False Teacher

After her star turn at the Golden Globes Sunday night, Oprah is the media darling once again—and the hope of America? Sue Bohlin blogged about Oprah's spirituality when her daily TV show ended.

May 24, 2011

Tomorrow is the last episode of the Oprah Winfrey show on network TV. Oprah will be throwing her considerable energies and resources into her own cable network (OWN: The Oprah Winfrey Network). But she has left a huge footprint on the culture and on the hearts and minds of millions of loyal fans.

People have said for years that they wished Oprah were their next door neighbor or their best friend. And for good reason: she is winsome. She is open and transparent. She is incredibly generous. She not only asks the questions you would ask of her guests, she has the power to draw some of the most powerful and influential people to her stage, ranging from U.S. presidents to Billy Graham.

But she is so much more than a talk-show host. She sees herself as a teacher, and she certainly has used her pulpit to teach and preach—worldwide, as evidenced by the outpouring of love and attendance at her recent tour of Australia.

The problem is that what she's teaching, both personally and through the spiritual gurus she has brought into the limelight, is poisonous. It not only keeps unbelievers in the dark, but she has the power to draw undiscerning, untaught Christians into her spiritual gravity field of heresy.

Oprah is a false teacher of postmodern religion, an a la carte spirituality where people pick and choose their beliefs from a cafeteria line of offerings. She started out with a strong foundation in the Baptist church, but over time she drifted into unbiblical New Age beliefs. She mentions God a lot, but she defines Him in her own way. She has become a Christian-flavored pantheist, one who believes that an impersonal god, ("however you choose to describe him") is a universal force or energy. She embraces karmic destiny from Zen Buddhism. She helped launch "The Secret," the best-selling book promising that wishing will make it so through "The Law of Attraction"—the belief that you attract whatever you think about, whether good or bad.

And she enthusiastically proclaims religious pluralism: “One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe that there is only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to what you call God.”

One of Oprah’s buddies is Marianne Williamson, a teacher of [A Course in Miracles](#). In 2008, on her XM Satellite Radio show “Oprah and Friends,” listeners were offered a year-long course of study on this book which was channeled from a demon. At the same time, she and author Eckhard Tolle offered a webinar featuring his book [A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose](#) (the link takes you to a Probe article providing analysis of the book). This book is Eastern mysticism, which is incompatible with biblical Christianity, but many Christians can’t tell the difference.

Oprah’s response to a question about reconciling *A New Earth* with her Christian background was not only eye-opening, but it also shows her point of departure from biblical truth:

I’ve reconciled it because I was able to open my mind about the absolute indescribable hugeness of that which we call ‘God.’ I took God out of the box because I grew up in the Baptist church and there were, you know, rules and, you know, belief systems indoctrined. And I happened to be sitting in church in my late twenties . . . And this great minister was preaching about how great God was and how omniscient and omnipresent, and God is everything. And then he said, ‘And the Lord thy God is a jealous God.’ And I was, you know, caught up in the rapture of that moment until he said ‘jealous.’ And something struck me. I was thinking God is all, God is omnipresent, God is—and God’s also jealous? God is jealous of me? And something about that didn’t feel right in my spirit because I believe that God is love and that God is in all things. And so that’s when the search for something more than doctrine started to stir within me.

“And I love this quote that Eckhart has, this is one of my

favorite quotes in chapter one where he says, 'Man made god in his own image, the eternal, the infinite, and unnamable was reduced to a mental idol that you had to believe in and worship as my god or our god.'

"And you know, it's been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we're all talking about here. Jesus came to say, 'Look I'm going to live in the body, in the human body and I'm going to show you how it's done.' These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn't come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don't believe that Jesus came to start Christianity. So that was also very helpful to me.

Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). That's either true, or it's false.

And not even "the divine Miss O" can get around that. Please join me in praying that she will return to the Lord of truth—and please stay discerning about anything and everything Oprah says. If God doesn't agree with it, it's false. And it's dangerous.

Addendum, post-Finale show:

In the hour-long sermon of her farewell show, Oprah was consistent with her values and her perception of herself as teacher. It was filled with her inspirational "you can do it" rhetoric that has endeared her to us for 25 years.

She did address the spirituality issue. She said that when

people ask how she lasted, how she did it for 25 years, she answers, "My team—and Jesus." She added, "Nothing but the hand of God has made it possible." Her life is permeated by awareness of God's presence and grace in her life, but she has been deceived by the lies of the enemy. She said, "People want to know, which God are you talkin' about? The same one you're talkin' about: the alpha and omega, the omniscient, the omnipresent, the ultimate consciousness, the source, the force, the all of everything there is, the one and only Gee Oh Dee. That's the one I'm talkin' about."

This description of her God is a combination of the biblical God (alpha and omega, omniscient, omnipresent) and the impersonal divinity of pantheism (the source, the force, the all of everything there is). Note that "the one and only Gee Oh Dee" is not the way God reveals Himself to us in His word—as Father, Son and Spirit.

Oprah invokes her memory of Jesus as a warm and fuzzy throwback to her childhood, like a beloved teddy bear that you love but keep on the shelf as a reminder of younger days. She's not dealing with the Jesus who insisted He is the only way to the Father!

John Piper makes a great point about how people (in this case, the 5000 whom Jesus had miraculously fed) choose their own Jesus, as I suggest Oprah does:

Because the enthusiasm these people have is not for who he really is. This is so important for our day and for your life. People can have a great enthusiasm for Jesus, but the Jesus they're excited about is not the real biblical Jesus. It may be a morally exemplary Jesus, or a socialist Jesus, or a capitalist Jesus, or an anti-Semitic Jesus, or a white-racist Jesus, or a revolutionary-liberationist Jesus, or a counter-cultural cool Jesus. But not the whole Jesus who, in the end, gives his life a ransom for sinners. And if your enthusiasm for Jesus is for a Jesus that doesn't exist, your

enthusiasm is no honor to the real Jesus, and he will leave you and go into the mountain.[\[1\]](#)

As I mentioned in my blog post, Oprah's point of departure from orthodoxy was hearing in church, "The Lord thy God is a jealous God." Instead of checking her reaction to this statement with a pastor or someone more theologically taught than she, Oprah slammed the door on the fundamentals of Christianity and gave herself permission to pursue a god more to her taste. What a difference it would have made if she had allowed someone to assure her, "No, Oprah, God is not jealous *of* you. He is jealous *for* you! He loves you so much, He wants your full and undivided heart. Let go of your misunderstanding and embrace the Father who loves you more than you can imagine."

Instead, she has embraced a vague and impersonal divinity who is indistinguishable from the universe. In fact, one of the prayers of her life has been, "What would You-God-the universe-have me do?" The problem with this is that God and the universe are not the same thing. God is the creator of the universe. He is before, above, and outside the universe. The universe is part of His creation. There is no point in asking a part of creation what it would have her do, because the universe is a fellow creature of the Most High God along with Oprah.

Much has been made of her farewell words, "Until we meet again." But those were not her last words.

The final words of her finale were, "To God be the glory." And I truly do think she means it.

I think that Oprah is not evil, she's deceived. And I will continue to pray for her.

Note

1. John Piper, "The All-Providing King Who Would Not Be King,"

www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-all-providing-king-who-would-not-be-king.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/oprah_america%E2%80%99s_beloved_false_teacher

Loving God Through Xmas Music?

From Thanksgiving to Christmas Day, the sounds of Christmas music are everywhere: stores, TV specials, many radio stations. Every year, the biggest oldies station in Dallas becomes “The Christmas Station,” this year starting in mid-November.

There are two ways to respond to Christmas music, I think. One way is to let it stream unfiltered into our hearts and minds as the background noise of our December lives. The other is to be intentional about categorizing what we hear, letting it all remind us of “the reason for the season.”

I suggest that Christmas music falls into four categories, and we can mentally tag each song with the appropriate category as we listen:

Songs About Weather

What do sleigh rides have to do with Jesus’ birthday? Nothing. But a number of songs we only hear in December are focused on northern-hemisphere weather. Key words are snow, cold, frosty, winter, and jingle bells (because they belong on sleighs, apparently).

Songs About Fantasy

All songs about Santa Claus, the Grinch, elves, and Frosty the Snowman belong in this category. Make-believe characters have nothing to do with the birth of the Savior, but we only hear them at Christmas.

Songs About “Xmas Feelings”

There are lots of songs invoking warm and fuzzy feelings about Christmas, and being together, and good cheer. It’s “the happiest season of all,” right? Other songs highlight what the singer wants for Christmas, ranging from a kid’s two front teeth to the not-TOO-greedy “Santa Baby” song: a fur coat, a car, a yacht and a ring. Be sure to hang some mistletoe so you can score a kiss from somebody. (Except that given the current movement to expose sexual harassment and crimes, that might not be the best move right now.) I call these “Xmas Feelings” because although the songs are played at Christmastime, none of them have anything to do with the reason we celebrate Christmas in the first place. It’s a totally secular feel-good holiday, so we can just X out the Christ of Christmas.

Songs About the Birth of Christ

Aaaah . . . *now* we’re talking! Most songs about Jesus’ birth are either Christmas carols, long venerated for the very good reason that they proclaim truth. We call them carols, but they’re really hymns that celebrate the Incarnation, God leaving heaven to become man. Most carols show deep insight into the glorious mystery of the Incarnation. “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” proclaims, “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity.” My favorite Christmas carol, “Joy to the World,” exhorts us—and the whole world—to embrace the Savior: “Let earth receive her King, Let every heart prepare Him room, And heaven and nature sing. . .”

In addition to Christmas carols, some more modern songs teach biblical doctrine. “Mary Did You Know,” written by Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene in 1991, elevates Jesus in a most worshipful way. “Mary did you know . . . when you kiss your little Baby you kiss the face of God? . . . This sleeping Child you’re

holding is the Great I AM?" Still gives me goosebumps. Every time I hear it.

The continual presence of Christmas music is a good opportunity to practice discernment with every song by asking, "Which category does this song go in?" Using biblical wisdom to think intentionally is one way we can love God with our minds, as Jesus said is part of the greatest commandment (Luke 10:27). But then we can go on to a second step, which is to connect the dots between the songs and the Lord behind "the reason for the season."

When we hear a song about weather: "Lord, I praise You for being the creator of winter—and spring, summer and fall."

When we hear a song about fantasy characters: "Lord, I praise You for being real and true, and not make-believe like Santa or Frosty."

When we hear a song about Xmas feelings: "Lord, the longings of the heart for love and for home and for belonging are all met in You. Thank You for drawing me into relationship with You as the giver of these good things."

When we hear a song about Jesus' birth: "Lord, Happy Birthday! Thank You for leaving heaven and coming to earth to reconcile us with the Father. Thank You for this wonderful song that reminds us that You are Lord."

Bonus points for identifying "category error" songs that mix fantasy and truth. Examples: "Here Comes Santa Claus" mixes the made-up Santa and the True God:

"Peace on earth will come to all, if we just follow the light
So let's give thanks to the Lord above 'cause Santa Claus comes tonight."

Then there's "Up on the Rooftop":

Up on the rooftop

Click, click, click
Down through the chimney with
Good Saint Nick

Santa is not Saint Nicholas, a 4th-century Christ-follower in modern-day Turkey. St. Nicholas didn't come down chimneys with toys for good little girls and boys! Santa is fantasy; "St. Nick" is real.

Happy singing . . . and thinking!

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[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/loving_god_through_xmas_musi
c](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/loving_god_through_xmas_music)
on December 12, 2017.

What a Day of ThanksLIVING Looks Like

"Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father . . ." (Ephesians 5:20). That's a pretty tall order: *all the time?* for *all* things? Seriously?

When I was first challenged to obey this scripture, some 44 years ago, I thought that surely it wasn't translated properly. Or maybe there was a footnote. Or an asterisk. Surely *some* kind of loophole, right?

Nope. It means just what it says. We can continually give thanks for all things because if God is truly in control, then everything He allows us to experience comes with His permission-and thus He has a plan. For everything He allows. Even if we can't see it.

It became a way of life for me, and has been a habit for over four decades. With the celebration of Thanksgiving looming next week, I paid attention to what that long-standing habit sounds like in the course of a day.

[Upon waking] “Oh, it’s morning. Thank You, Lord, that my radio came on at the right time. That means we had uninterrupted electricity all night.” Alternatively, “Oh, it’s morning. Thank You so much for the blessing of being able to sleep till I woke up, with no alarm! What a blessing!”

[Upon turning over in bed] “Lord, thank You so, so much that I can shift position without pain now! Thank you again for the stem cell treatment that made it possible!”

[Upon getting out of bed into my mobility scooter] “Lord, {ouch ouch ouch} I thank You that the pain of moving from the bed to my scooter will dissipate quickly. And thank You again that I have a scooter for getting around.”

[Standing up to transfer from the scooter to the commode] “Owwwww! But Lord, I thank You for the grab bars to lean on, and thank You for the new tall handicap toilet. It is so much easier to use this than the regular ones everywhere else.”

[Riding to the kitchen] “Lord, thank You for speed and painlessness! I love being the fastest one in the house!”

[Making coffee] “Lord! Bless You for creating coffee! Thank You for caffeine! Thank You for my coffee maker, and half and half, and sweetener. Thank You for mugs. Thank You for Central Market and the wonderful flavored coffees I can get there. Thank You for blessing [our son] Kevin in the coffee world—Lord, order his steps today in Nepal while he’s investigating becoming coffee partners with farmers there, and use him to help fight sex trafficking through coffee instead.”

[Moving to the couch] “Oh Lord, owwwww—thank You that the pain will subside quickly, and thank You for our couch and the

table to hold my coffee while I read Your word. Thank You for a Bible in English and the ability to read. Thank You for the Holy Spirit to illumine its meaning to me. Thank You for an online Bible reading program from my church that allows me to join with thousands of people worldwide in reading the same passage and then reading a devotional from one of our members. Thank You for the technology that allows me to affirm the devotional writer and share my take on today's reading."

[Preparing to take a shower] "Thank You again, Lord, for this magnificent roll-in shower You gave us in the recent renovation to make our house handicap-friendly. Thank You for the grab bars and for the bench seat that lets me sit down. Thank You for the hand-held shower. And for hot water. And for clean hot water! And for 24/7 clean hot water! Thank You for the blessing of being able to take it for granted, but Lord, I don't want to take it for granted."

[Getting in the car] "Thank You, Lord, for [our son who lives with us] Curt's availability to help me get in and out of the car and take care of the scooter. Thank You that the barometric pressure is stable today so my pain level is lower. Thank You that no rain is forecast. Oh, there's our trash bin at the edge of the driveway; thank You for helping Ray remember to get it out before the garbage truck came by. And thank You for garbage pick-up, Lord! Thank You for people willing to take care of that for us!"

[Driving] "Thank You for paved roads, Lord. And for traffic lights. And for the engineers who set all that up. Thank You that everybody drives on the same side of the street. And thank You for everybody honoring that red lights mean stop and green lights mean go. Thank You that I can read all the road signs and street sights because they're in English. I remember sounding out the Cyrillic letters in Belarus like a kindergartner, and thank You for helping me do that when I was able to go, but today I'm thankful to be surrounded by English!"

[Arriving at church for Bible study] “Thank You, Lord, for the growing number of friends in ‘Sue’s Scooter Army’ who are trained to help me by getting the scooter out of the car and bringing it to me at the driver’s seat. Thank You for their sweet joy in genuinely being glad to help. Thank You for making my love language acts of service, so it makes me feel so loved!”

[Riding into the church] “Lord, thank You for electricity, and comfort because of the heating and air conditioning. Thank You there’s nobody threatening to arrest or persecute us for coming to church. Thank You for the freedom to study Your word publicly . . . and Lord, today I am so very very grateful for the privilege of teaching Your word to precious women who are so teachable and so appreciative. Thank You for the ramp that allows me to ride my scooter onto the stage. Thank You for the face mic that lets me keep my hands free. Thank You for the lights, and the padded chairs, and the audio system, and for Powerpoint that’s working so everybody can see the slides I prepared. Thank You for the other leaders who helped me do my run through the other day so I could make my lecture even better. Thank You, Lord, for your Holy Spirit to empower me to speak Your truth in Your strength, to Your glory.”

And that takes me to 10:30. That’s what thanksLIVING looks like.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_a_day_of_thanksliving_looks_like on November 14, 2017.

Did the Hurricanes Wash Away the Hate?

In the midst and aftermath of the destruction caused by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, I saw a number of comments in social media marveling at how people came together and served each other regardless of race, religion, or any other “us/them” division. Immediately before the hurricanes, the subject of hate was hot and furious in the various media. Then suddenly people weren’t talking about it. Something much bigger and much more immediate consumed our attention.

So that left an intriguing question: did the hurricanes wash away the hate?

Alas, no.

It didn’t take long before a third hurricane, Maria, decimated America’s own Puerto Rico, and the horrific humanitarian crisis became fodder for politically-related contempt and ugliness in the media. This was immediately followed by the mass shooting in Las Vegas that remains a mystery.

What in the world is going on?

In answering a question about signs indicating the end times, GotQuestions.org writes, “An increase in false messiahs, an increase in warfare, and **increases in famines, plagues, and natural disasters**—these are signs of the end times. In [Matthew 24:5-8], though, we are given a warning: we are not to be deceived, because these events are only the beginning of birth pains; the end is still to come.” (emphasis mine)

Paul writes this to Timothy about the end times:

You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only

themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. **They will be cruel and hate what is good.** They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that! (2 Timothy 3:3-5, emphasis mine)

This sure sounds like 2017, doesn't it? The subjects of cruelty and hate are front-page news stories, whether we're learning of new beheadings or accusations of new hate groups. Recently, CNN published the Southern Poverty Law Center's "hate map," which lumps together true hate-fueled organizations with Christian ministries holding to historic biblical orthodoxy. I follow this story because two years ago, SPLC put Probe Ministries on their hate map for being "anti-LGBT." And since I am the one who writes most of the content for Probe.org on sexuality and gender issues, they were mainly pointing their finger at me.

So while some people were wondering if the hurricanes had washed away the hate, I found myself writing a number of answers to email and social media posts assuring people that no, Probe is not a hate group, and inviting them—as I always have—to identify any words of hatred on our website. No one has ever shown me any hateful words. (I don't think we've ever written any hateful words to begin with, but I have always vetted anything I've written on the subject of LGBT by first submitting it to friends who used to identify as gay or lesbian.) But simply writing about homosexuality as not God's design, and the truth that Jesus Christ changes people and sometimes that includes people's same-sex attractions, is purportedly potential fuel for those who would commit violence against LGBT people.

(What's interesting is that an armed man used the SPLC hate map to attempt to commit violence against the Family Research Council as retribution for their inclusion on the hate list. The SPLC doesn't seem to have a problem with that.)

As my pastor says, "Truth sounds like hate to those who hate the truth." There are so many cultural lies about God's design for sex and identity that when we proclaim God's truth in a culture that embraces lies, we get called hateful and discriminatory.

No, the hurricanes did not wash away the hate; they just distracted us for a time, I think. I do believe we are seeing the birth pangs of the end times, and the world is going to continue to get darker and more hostile to those holding a biblical worldview. My prayer is that we will be faithful to stand for what is right and true no matter the cost.

Even when we're slimed with false accusations of hate.

This blog post originally appeared at
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The Eclipse Declares the Glory of God



“The heavens declare the glory of God,” Psalm 19 tells us. On August 21, 2017, millions of Americans will have an incredible opportunity to see His heavenly glory in a way most of us never have: through a total solar eclipse. On a path running from Oregon to

South Carolina, observers on the ground will see the moon slip in front of the sun, blocking out all its light and dropping the temperature drastically (about 10 to 15 degrees Fahrenheit) and suddenly.

The glory of God isn't just seen, it's *felt* as well. Eclipse-chasers, and even those who have only experienced one total eclipse, report that at the moment of totality (when the moon completely covers the sun, plunging the land into an eerie darkness), people break out with yells and shouts and applause. Many report the hair on the back of their necks standing up. And both locals and visiting astronomers are equally in awe—and often in tears. Like one's first in-person look at the Grand Canyon, it is deeply emotional to be thrilled by something much, much bigger than oneself.

Illustra Media's wonderful DVD *The Privileged Planet*, based on the book by the same name by Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards [\[1\]](#), exposed me to the magnificence of a total solar eclipse. I will never forget the goosebumps at learning that the sun is 400 times farther away than our moon, but it's also 400 times larger. This means that both of these heavenly bodies appear to be the same size to us on Earth. This phenomenal “coincidence” [read: declaring the glory of God!] also makes a total eclipse possible.

During an eclipse, *the heavens declare the glory of God* by

allowing us to see things about the sun we wouldn't be able to observe any other way, beautiful and gloriously resplendent. Just before totality we can see "Baily's Beads." Only seen during an eclipse, bright "beads" appear at the edge of the moon where the sun is shining through lunar valleys, a

feature of the moon's rugged landscape. This is followed by the "diamond ring" effect, where the brightness of the sun radiates as a thin band around the circumference of the moon, and the last moments of the sun's visibility explode like a diamond made of pure light. After the minutes of totality, the diamond ring effect appears again on the opposite side of the moon as the first rays of the sun flare brilliantly. These sky-jewelry phenomena are so outside of mankind's control that witnessing them stirs our spirits (even on YouTube!) with the truth of Romans 1:20—"God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."



A total solar eclipse offers so much more, though, than Baily's Beads and the Diamond Ring. At the moment of totality, the pinkish arc of the sun's chromosphere (the part of the sun's atmosphere just above the surface) suddenly "turns on" as if an unseen hand flips a switch. I knew God is very fond of pink because of how He paints

glorious sunrises and sunsets in Earth's skies, but those fortunate enough to see a total eclipse can see how He

radiates pinkness from the sun itself! *The heavens declare the glory of God!*

But wait! That's not all! Along with the flare of the sun's pink chromosphere, a rainbow-like band called the "flash spectrum" appears when the sun is viewed through a prism! (You can google this to see pictures. The best ones are copyrighted so I can't show them to you here.) *The heavens declare the colorful glory of God!*

For the few minutes of totality, the naked eye can see the sun's lovely corona (Latin for crown) streaming out from the sun. We can't see the corona except during an eclipse because looking straight at the sun for even a few seconds causes eye damage, and because the sun's ball of fire overwhelms the (visually) fragile corona. This is another way that an eclipse allows us to see how *the heavens declare the glory of God.*



Astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez noticed details about eclipses that got him excited:

- During a total solar eclipse, the moon is just large enough to block the large photosphere (the big ball of fiery gas), but not so large that it obscures the colorful chromosphere.
- The moon and the sun are two of the roundest measured bodies in the solar system. (Some moons are potato-shaped!) So when the round disk of the moon passes in front of the equally round disk of the sun, the shapes match perfectly.

- He studied all 65 of the moons in our solar system and discovered that ours are the best planet and best moon for studying the sun during an eclipse. Because the moon fits so perfectly over the sun, its blinding light is shielded, providing astronomers with a view of the sun's atmosphere. We can discern finer details in its chromosphere and corona than from any other planet.
- Being able to study the flash spectrum during a total eclipse enables astro-scientists to determine the chemical makeup of other, distant stars without leaving Earth.

These facts of ***the heavens declare the glory of God!***

Michael Bakich writes in Astronomy Magazine blog, [{2}](#)

This eclipse will be the most-viewed ever. I base this proclamation on four factors: 1) the attention it will get from the media; 2) the superb coverage of the highway system in our country; 3) the typical weather on that date; and 4) the vast number of people who will have access to it from nearby large cities.

Whether you are fortunate enough to be in the path of the total eclipse, or like me will only get to see 75% of the sun's surface covered by the moon (with eclipse glasses, of course!), this extremely important sky event will be proclaiming to everyone that ***the heavens declare the glory of God***. May it make a lasting impression on us all that teaches us more about God's glory!

1.

<http://cs.astronomy.com/asy/b/astronomy/archive/2014/08/05/25-facts-you-should-know-about-the-august-21-2017-total-solar-eclipse.aspx>

2. Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2004).

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_eclipse_declares_the_glorious_of_god on August 9, 2017.

Keeping A Gratitude Journal

Some years ago Dr. Billy Graham was a guest on Oprah. I will never forget his answer to her question, “What are you most thankful for?”

He said, “Salvation given to us in Jesus Christ . . . and the way you have made people all over this country aware of the power of being grateful.”

I loved that he took advantage of the platform to share the core of the gospel message, but also that he honored Oprah for making a difference in the culture by stressing gratitude the way she has. Millions of people have discovered the power of keeping a gratitude journal because of Oprah’s testimony of how it impacted her life.

There’s a difference between a grateful thought popping into our heads, even if we turn it into a prayer of gratitude, and the intentionality and physicality of daily writing down three things from that day for which we are grateful. There’s something about writing with pen and ink on paper that carves the thoughts into our brains. (See my blog post [Pen > ‘Puter](#))

There’s also something about recording our gratitude that changes the way we think. We become more aware of the ways in which God blesses us with what I call His “hugs and kisses” throughout the day. Instead of taking for granted the fact that the traffic lights were all synced up to allow us to sail through green lights all the way to our destination, we say,

“Oh, thank You, Lord!” light after light, our sense of wonder and appreciation enlarging with each intersection. When the rain starts literally the second after we climb into the car and slam the door shut, we say, “Oh Lord!! Bless You!” instead of saying, “Wow, that was lucky.” When we wake up in the morning and realize we didn’t have to get up and use the restroom, we see it as the blessing and gift that it is rather than taking it for granted.

I always suggest keeping a gratitude journal for those battling depression. If they are especially depressed, I suggest writing down ten things instead of three or five. When we are deep in the weeds of despair and hopelessness, it’s easy to believe the lie that nobody cares, including God. But even those immersed in the mire of darkness can still find things to be grateful for: any body part that works, any body part that doesn’t hurt, heating or air conditioning, a bed to sleep in, access to clean water to drink and bathe in, being surrounded by people who speak the same language, internet access, a car, family members who still love them, a job, their memory, the ability to read . . . the list goes on and on, if they will pay attention. (Let me take a moment to point you to an excellent article on Bible.org by my dear friend Ann Golding: [“Helping a Friend Through the Darkness of Depression.”](#))

Several years ago, Ann Voskamp taught more millions of people to keep a gratitude journal in her book *One Thousand Gifts*. She explained that everything that God allows to happen to us is filtered through His love and grace, so even if it’s horrible and painful, it is transformed into a gift for which we can say “Thank You.”

One of my pastors regularly posts to Instagram a picture of the gifts he’s grateful for, hashtagged with a number. Having started at #1000, he’s at #538 today. Not surprisingly, JP [@jpokluda] is one of the most joy-filled people you’ll ever meet. He lives immersed in always-conscious gratitude that

overflows into joy.

It would be reasonable for you to wonder about MY gratitude journal, right?

Well, I kept one many years ago when I first learned about God's command to give thanks not only IN everything, (1 Thessalonians 5:18) but FOR everything (Ephesians 5:20). And an interesting thing happened: developing and maintaining an attitude of gratitude become a way of life for me, like breathing. Recently I realized that my "thank Yous" outnumber my "please" prayers by about a 9-to-1 margin. I guess the discipline of keeping a gratitude journal became a part of who I am.

And I'm good with that. :::smile:::

This blog post originally appeared at
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on June 27, 2017.

Free Indeed!

Recently I had the privilege of speaking in a women's prison. I shared my story which I call, "[How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can't Change](#)." (How's that for a topic of interest for incarcerated people?)



But then I was able to speak briefly about what we have in common, a situational loss of freedom. I have lost the ability—the freedom—to walk, and they have temporarily lost the ability—the freedom—to walk out of lockup. Still, even while imprisoned by our situations, Jesus offers *true freedom*

that has nothing to do with our circumstances. He promised to His disciples, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” He even said, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:32, 36)

So what does THAT mean?

What was so crazy great about this opportunity to speak to and hug and love on the precious ladies in the women’s prison, was that the previous weekend I had given four messages on freedom at a women’s retreat at sea. (You can listen to the recordings [here](#), if you like.) So many facets of freedom were already rolling around in my head as I thought about Jesus’ offer of freedom to women in prison.

- As we look at our past, Jesus can set us free from guilt when we confess our sins and receive His forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9). He can set us free from shame, that feeling of not just *making* a mistake, but *being* a mistake, when we receive His gift of honor as He showers pleasure and acceptance on us.

- As we look at our present, Jesus can set us free from the “tapes” of lies and misbeliefs that control our lives, as we replace the lies with His truths. For example, a number of the ladies at the retreat had lived in bondage to the lie that

<u>Lies/Misbeliefs</u>	<u>Truth</u>
“If I mess up, that would be the end of the world. I have to be perfect.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Only God is perfect❖ He has promised to hold my hand when I stumble.<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Psalm 18:35❖ Psalm 73:23❖ I am longing for Eden

they had to be perfect in order to be acceptable. The weight of needing to be perfect is soul-killing because it's impossible for imperfect people to be perfect! But we can be set free by embracing the truth that only God is perfect, so we can let go of the unrealistic expectation that we can ever live perfectly this side of heaven. God knows we will stumble, and He has promised to hold our hand when we do. And beyond that, He understands our longing for perfection is actually a longing for the perfect home of Eden, which we will get to experience on the New Earth we read about in the book of Revelation.

- We can walk in the breathtaking freedom from the soul-crushing imprisonment of unforgiveness by forgiving those who have hurt or offended us. The weight of others' sins against us is bad enough, but Jesus said that if we refuse to forgive, we will be subject to tormentors—demonic torturers (Matthew 18:34-35). When we release our offenders over to Jesus for Him to deal with, we are set free—free indeed!

- As we think about the future, there is glorious freedom when we trust God instead of being controlled by fear. So often, we are in bondage to fear because we want to be in control. We forget that we are not God, wanting to manage not only our own lives but the lives of others. There is freedom in trusting

God instead of trying to control others.

- Proverbs 29:25 assures us that fear of man is a snare. This isn't talking about being afraid of people like some are afraid of heights, or the dark, or spiders. Fear of man is about working for other people's approval and fearing their disapproval. When we look to Jesus, though, we see how He modelled living for "an audience of One," caring only about pleasing His Father (John 8:29). When we follow Christ's example, living to please the Father instead of fickle people, there is freedom! I can personally attest to this. Because of my stubborn attachment to a biblical sexual ethic, I have been slimed online by people who despise God's standards. The slime slides off, though, when I keep my focus on the Lord and, like Jesus in Hebrews 12:2, I can "despise the shame" by refusing to accept it. That's what freedom feels like!

- There is true freedom in accepting God's choices for our lives: personality and temperament, introversion or extroversion, health limitations, even capacity. (Some people naturally have a "gallon" energy tank, while others naturally have a cup.) Resenting and fighting God's choices—even gender!—leads to expending mental and emotional energy that is restricting and costly. But embracing God's right to make these decisions for our design and our lives, laying down our non-existent "right" to define ourselves the way WE want, brings us freedom.

<i>Lies/Misbeliefs</i>	<i>Truth</i>
"My parents' problems were my fault."	❖ I don't have that kind of power.
"I am responsible for my parents (or my children's) happiness."	❖ Each one bears his own load – Gal 6:5
	❖ Each one is responsible for his own choices – Ezek. 18

- One of my dear friends discovered, in the process of working through the challenges of parenting a prodigal adult child, that there is freedom in owning 100% of our own part and 0% of other people's choices and behaviors. There's no point in taking on

guilt or responsibility for someone else's choices; they are completely responsible for their part.

- And finally (though definitely not exhaustively), we are free to choose our attitudes. We can decide to either live in bondage to an attitude of entitlement or a continual expectation of the negative, or live in freedom by developing an attitude of gratitude. I love Dr. Charles Swindoll's poem on Attitude:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude
on life.

Attitude, to me, is more important than facts.

It is more important than the past,
than education, than money,
than circumstances, than failure, than successes,
than what other people think or say or do.

It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill.
It will make or break a company . . . a church . . . a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice
everyday regarding the attitude
we will embrace for that day.

We cannot change our past . . .
we cannot change the fact that people
will act in a certain way.

We cannot change the inevitable.

The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have,
and that is our attitude.

I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me
and 90% of how I react to it.

And so it is with you . . . we are in charge of our Attitudes.

It's possible to be "free indeed." Regardless of your
circumstances. Choose the freedom Jesus offers!

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