

“Are Dreadlocks OK for a Christian?”

Is it okay for a Christian to wear dreadlocks?

The answer to this question will depend on the motive of the person wearing the dreadlocks. Why are they wearing them and what are they saying by it? This approach applies equally to any style of dress. There is no Christian haircut or clothing style. There are only Christians who wear clothes or wear their hair in a particular way for a certain reason. It might be a good way to start off a conversation with someone who wears dreadlocks by asking why he or she wears their hair that way. Generally, dreadlocks represent a person's close connection to Reggae music and Rastafarianism; but not necessarily, since in our society people adopt certain trends and styles simply for the novelty and then are on to the next fashion. Clothing, like food, should not be a source of contention for Christians. Romans 14 tells us that every believer is responsible before the Lord for their actions and that because we have the Holy Spirit, we will be able to make the right choices that are pleasing to the Lord.

Lawrence Terlizzese, Ph.D.

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“Let Me Tell You About How I

Know God Has a Sense of Humor”

I was reading Sue Bohlin’s blog post [Does God Has a Sense of Humor?](#), and I have something to add. My name, Talitha, is from Mark 5:41. It means “Little Girl.” My mother told me that when she was pregnant with me, God told her to name me Talitha. Oh, and the kicker? I’m five-foot, and 108 pounds, roughly. God DOES has a sense of humor!

Love it! Thank you so much for sharing your story—and for making me smile!

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin

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“I Feel So Guilty That My Baby Was Born with a Birth Defect After I Had an Abortion”

I had an abortion when I was young. Several years later I gave birth to a child with a disability. My guilt knows no bounds. I feel God is punishing my child with a life of suffering due to my horrible sin. I think of King David and how God punished his sin by killing his baby. At least his baby died and went

to Heaven. My child will live and suffer all the days of their life. I know it's my fault. What can I do?

Thank you from the bottom of my broken heart.

Guilty Mom

I understand your feelings of guilt, but let me gently point out that you have connected the dots between your abortion and your child's disability as if one caused the other. Since the vast majority of post-abortal mothers deliver healthy babies after their abortion, this is not an automatic cause-and-effect relationship. In addition, many babies with disabilities are born to mothers who didn't have abortions.

Secondly, the nature and character of God is that He does not punish innocents for the sins of their mothers. Twice in the Old Testament, God corrects this wrong assumption; here's one:

“What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children’s teeth are set on edge’?”

“As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.

“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.”
(Ezek 18:2-4)

This passage teaches that the consequences of one's sins are borne by the one who sinned, not their children. (Now I will admit that there are effects of a parent's sins on a family, such as angry parents producing fearful children, but that's not the same as God punishing a child for the parent's sin.)

One of the reasons Jesus left heaven to come to earth as one of us, was to show us what the Father is really like. He knew that we would paint the face of His Father out of the paint bucket of misunderstanding and fear that comes from our own warped perception of God. If you read the parable of the

prodigal son in Luke 15, you'll see the true heart of the Father—and He's not the kind of God who would punish a child for their mother's sin.

This same Father allowed David to experience a deep brokenness from his sin of adultery by taking David's baby home to be with Himself. The God of Luke 15 is the same Father who disciplined His beloved David for his sin. God is not a vindictive, punishing God who takes pleasure in making His children suffer, but He knows what kind of discipline will best produce the beauty of Christlikeness in us.

Yes, your child will live with a disability all the days of their life. But let me assure you, as one who has lived with a disability almost from birth (so I have no memory of being strong and healthy), God has used my disability in mighty and profound ways. It has not been a punishment, even on my worst days; I have even gotten to the point, at age 59, of realizing that my disability is one of His greatest gifts to me. This has become my life verse:

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. (2 Cor 4:16-18)

It's easy, in our limited way of seeing things, to believe that suffering in any form is evil and to be avoided at all costs. This is not the way things work in the "real" world where Jesus is Lord. Suffering can accomplish very good and important things in our lives that we can't experience any other way. I wrote an article called ["The Value of Suffering"](#) that is one of the best things I've ever written, which you may find helpful.

You ask what you should do.

Your heart is so tender and wounded, there is no doubt that you have confessed your sin over and over, so that part is done. But 1 John 1:9 has another wonderful part to it:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You have confessed your sin; because God is good, He has not only forgiven you, He has cleansed you from the stain of your sin. You are clean. It's all over. If you have trusted in Jesus' life, death and resurrection for you, you are a new creature and He is renewing you from the inside out.

So at this point, you can tell God, "Thank You for forgiving me, thank You for cleansing me, thank You for redeeming my sin and turning something evil into something good. Thank You for being bigger than my sins, and being able to turn things around in ways I cannot imagine. With Jesus' help, I receive the assurance that You have forgiven me and will use my child's disability for great and glorious purposes. Help my heart catch up with my head on this. Help me to see that You allowed me to go down that dark path into sin because You are able to redeem even the worst things we do."

I pray for you, _____, for the peace that passes understanding (Phil. 4:7) to anoint you like warm oil and soak down deep into your heart.

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

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“How Do I Deal With Emotional Doubt?”

Hello Mr. Gleghorn,

I was reading your [web page about doubt](#) and agree with all of it. However, I noticed you didn't cover the topic of emotional doubt.

I have been a believer since 1994. If I examine any argument against God, I know the truth, yet I still get this nagging feeling that says, “Are you sure there is a God?” “What if all this is fairy tale?”... So I go to all the arguments and prove to myself the Bible is true and am comforted, but it doesn't last.. the same feelings come again and again... and I know they are just emotion and I can answer them with facts and yet the doubt feeling continues. . .

I just want that confidence I used to have. . . I am not living in sin (not that I know of) and I want to serve the Lord with all my heart. What do I do to stop this incessant doubt feeling???

Since you found my article, you are probably already familiar with the work of Dr. Gary Habermas. If not, he's probably the first person that I would direct you to for dealing with emotional doubt. Here's the link to his website: www.garyhabermas.com

And here's a link to resources that came up from his website when I entered in the topic “emotional doubt” [here](#).

Finally, I also typed the topic into Google and some other resources featuring Habermas came up [here](#).

Now concerning your question, it may be the case that these “feelings” will plague you for years. Of course, the Lord might suddenly deliver you from this, but it may also be part of His plan for you to struggle with these feelings for some time. If so, then it seems to me that some of the most important things that you can do (and you’re already doing many of them) are the following:

1. Spend time with the Lord in His word and prayer, listening to music, praising and worshipping Him—or, if you’re the more contemplative type, meditating on His attributes (particularly, His goodness and love).

2. Spend time with God’s people. Be involved in a good, Bible-believing local church and get involved in at least one small group as well (maybe a men’s group). You’ve already learned that God’s people aren’t perfect, so you won’t have unrealistic expectations. Nevertheless, the people of God can be a great help to one another in mutual encouragement and support (which we all need) as we walk through the Christian life day by day. Ask these people to join you in praying about your doubts and discouragement.

3. Recognize that these feelings may, at least in part, be “spiritual warfare”—and be prepared to fight against them. In particular, “take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:16). Indeed, it might be good to memorize Ephesians 6:10-18. And remember, just because you raise the shield of faith one day, and block many of the evil one’s flaming arrows, he may very well return the next day, and the next. So stay ready and be prepared for battle every single day regarding this issue.

4. Finally, you may also find it profitable to read biographies of some of the great men and women of God from church history. This will encourage you that God’s saints have often faced great difficulties, challenges, and obstacles in their lives. Read John Bunyan’s, *Grace Abounding to the Chief*

of Sinners, or a biography on Martin Luther, for example. There are many good Christian biographies out there and these stories will greatly strengthen and encourage you, I think.

One final thought, if you're not familiar with the apologetic work of William Lane Craig, you might also enjoy that. Here's a link to his site: www.reasonablefaith.org

I hope these thoughts are helpful, _____ as you continue to wrestle with these doubts. Since you may struggle with these doubts for years, I would encourage you to hunker down for the long haul. If God delivers you sooner, praise be to His mighty name. But if not, at least you're prepared for what could be a long, hard fight. And remember to seek God's help against the powers of darkness. We're sometimes tempted to discount spiritual warfare (and sometimes, of course, we maybe should). But if we always discount it, then something is wrong. For Paul tells us that we will experience such warfare as Christians. So at least some of the time, what we're experiencing does have a source in the evil one. And right now you may be a victim of his fiery darts. So put on the armor of God and recognize that you have a terrible enemy who wants to see you fail—and don't give him the pleasure!

May the Lord greatly help and encourage you in your struggles _____!

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

_____,'

Michael's answer to your email was forwarded to me as the Probe webmistress because it's so good, and I keep thinking about your question.

You raise the point that biblical Christianity is supposed to be a relationship with God, and it absolutely is. I think many people experience the same thing you do because instead of a real relationship, our Christianity is more like a cognitive acknowledgement of things that are true—and that tends to be one-way. And sterile.

What's missing is the love part, the foundation of what God wants in a relationship with Him (you know—Love God, love people? First and second commandments?) We love Him because He first loved us. . . but in our from-the-neck-up current experience of Christianity, we're missing the love part.

I want to suggest something to you that has really rocked my spiritual life. Dr. Baxter Kruger (who lives in Jackson, MS) is a Trinitarian theologian with all the intellectual chops to be deeply satisfying to my mind, but he is especially gifted at helping us see how very loved we are by the Father, Son and Spirit. He has a 5-part audio series called "You Are The Child Your Father Always Wanted" that I've listened to more times than I can count. I've never listened to ANYBODY'S messages multiple times like I do Baxter's. It's available free on iTunes here: itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/perichoresis.org-podcast/id367278246

Everyone that I've shared these messages with has been so thankful—and they, too, find themselves listening multiple times because he's offering such a major paradigm shift.

I have discovered over 40 years of walking with Jesus that the more I receive the many ways He loves me, the more I pay attention His "hugs and kisses," His ways of showing affection and care for me, the strength of my relationship with the Lord has a way of dissembling my emotional doubts. I pray the eyes of your heart will be open to see how you are immersed in a never-ending stream of divine love and honest affection for you, _____.

I truly hope this helps, as well as what Michael said.

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

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“What’s My Purpose in Life?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to John 15, it is the Lord's pleasure—and thus His purpose for us—that we bear *much* (as opposed to *some* or *more*)

fruit in us. That means Christlikeness; that means the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). So whether we are engaged in paid work or evangelizing on street corners, changing diapers or driving in traffic, putting Jesus on display is the most important thing. To do that, we need to continually immerse ourselves in His presence and His word, and hang around His people who are also immersing themselves in His presence and His word.

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

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

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/whats-my-purpose-in-life on Aug. 14, 2012.

“What Do You Do When Your Pastor Preaches Other People’s Sermons?”

What do you do when your pastor is preaching other people’s sermons week after week? No credit is given to the sermons he uses. I am starting to question the ease of obtaining other men’s work. This has been going on for at least two years; sometimes the sermons are almost word for word. I am at the point where I google every sermon. Places like Sermon Central and Saddleback offer many choices, I am not sure if they are providing a service/help or providing an excuse for no personal study. I don’t know where to go.

Thanks for your letter. This is an issue which (I suppose) would need to be taken up with the leadership of your local church. Since churches are governed differently, you would need to find out who the leaders of your local church are and take this matter up with them. Of course, you should first probably take the issue up with the pastor himself (Matthew 18:15-17).

Although the pastor should let the congregation know whose sermon he is preaching, there’s nothing inherently wrong with his preaching another person’s sermon. In fact, at various times in church history, when there have not been enough adequately trained leaders, men have read the sermons of others for the benefit of their congregation.

Charles Spurgeon tells how he was once away from his own congregation and attended a little country church only to hear one of his own sermons read from the pulpit! Of course, it’s also true (as you point out) that the pastor should not be neglecting personal time in the diligent study of the Bible. That, as I see it, is part of his job description!

At any rate, as I see it, this is a matter that needs to be discussed by the leadership in your local church. At the very least, however, the pastor should credit the author of the sermon he reads to the congregation.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“How Strong Does My Belief Need to be for Me to be Saved?”

This may seem like a strange question, but how strong does my belief need to be in order for me to be saved? I have been living I guess what you would call a carnal life (not praying or even thinking about God) for around 20 years and am beginning to wonder if I have lost my salvation or if I cannot be reconciled. Please help me, something is missing. I am worried that some of the feelings I sometimes have mean that I don't want to serve The Lord.

If you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can be saved (Matt. 17:20). The issue really is not so much the “size” or “amount” of your faith, but the object of your faith. Are you trusting Christ for salvation? If so, then you are saved, for your faith is placed in the only One who is really able to save you.

Now I must say that it's really not surprising that you don't

feel like you have much of a relationship with the Lord, for the fact is that (by your own admission) you don't. If, for the past twenty years or so, you haven't been seeking the Lord in prayer, spending time in His word, enjoying fellowship with other believers, seeking to serve the Lord in your own sphere of influence, etc., then it's really not surprising that you would feel distant from Him. The truth is, at this point in your life, you *are* distant from Him! It would be as if you had a friend that you had not spoken to or thought about in twenty years. What sort of friendship would that be? Not a very close one, right?

The good news, however, is that you can always repent, turn away from sin and turn back to God, and let Him know that you would like to begin to have a "real" relationship with Him. If you have truly trusted Christ for salvation, then your relationship with God is still intact. However, you've been out of fellowship with Him for the last twenty years. You scarcely even know the One you're trusting with your eternal destiny! Nevertheless, if you confess your sins, the Lord is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). So I would encourage you to go to the Lord in prayer, confess your sins, accept His forgiveness and cleansing, and get back in the game! You might want to read the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. I think you would find this story helpful at this point in your life.

A couple of helpful tips:

1. Begin spending some time each day with God both in prayer and reading the Bible (find a good translation that you like and can read without too much difficulty). You may want to begin reading a chapter a day in the Gospel of John.
2. Find a good, conservative, Bible-believing church where you can get involved with other believers in studying the Bible and serving the Lord. If they have small groups for fellowship

and Bible study, then get involved in one of those.

May the Lord bless you as you sincerely begin seeking Him again!

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“I Don’t Feel Connected to God”

April 28, 2011

What should I do if I don’t feel like I need to repent? How can I make myself more humble towards God?

This question is coming from a time of doubt in my life. I just have not been very connected with Jesus lately. I feel somewhat connected with God, though the personal relationship I used to have with His Son has gone out the window. It’s a strange situation. Part of this problem may be coming from not being humble before God – I feel like I can get by on my own sometimes. I don’t have any specific sin, just general ones that I struggle with day to day like pride. I was mostly looking for repentance in general.

Thanks for responding, and I hope this is clarifying. I also hope you enjoy your job. ☐ Thanks!

Hey Kara,

Yes, this is helpful, thanks. It seems as though you're basing the status of your relationship with the Lord only on how you feel. Perhaps you no longer have those warm-fuzzy feelings that you used to have in high school (I'm guessing based upon your email address that you graduated in '09). This kind of experience is very common for several reasons. Firstly, in most of American Christianity (especially in Evangelical and Charismatic circles, and most especially in youth group programs) we over-emphasize [feelings](#). Of course some of this is very natural because as we are growing into adulthood through our teen years, our emotions are developing and often on overdrive, which isn't bad per se; it's just how it is. Other reasons we often over-emphasize feelings have to do with our Church history in this country, especially the Great Awakenings and the efforts made to reach those on the Frontier. At any rate, the point is you're not alone. I have experienced the same exact thing you're talking about.

Here's my recommendation. We are all driven much more by our bodies than our brains. We typically consider this a bad thing, but it isn't. It's how we were created, embodied. I don't start feeling tired until I brush my teeth at night. Why? Because I brush my teeth right before I go to bed and my body associates the two habits. But if I wait until I *feel* tired, I'll stay up way too late. We have all sorts of routines like this. Since we are creatures of habit (by God's design), what we often need are habits and routines (which is a word we're really scared of) to help us remember God because *most of us* feel like we can get by on our own most of the time.

So, some suggestions.

- *Go on walks... without your iPod. You can train yourself to pray for your friends, family, the world... during these times. It will take time to discipline your mind, and that's okay; be gracious with yourself. Eventually, your mind will associate prayer with these walks, and it will just happen without your having to think about it. You might need to make*

these walks at the same time every week or every day, whatever. This can be tricky when our schedules are regularly changing, but that's okay too. The lunch hour can be a good time for this, especially since we are highly influenced by our stomachs. You can take your lunch with you or use that time to fast and pray (which includes, of course, repentance).

- Visit churches with different practices than you're used to. This may seem like an odd suggestion, but if you've only ever experienced one type of liturgy (which all churches have, it's just a church's Sunday morning (or whenever) routine), how can you know if it's a liturgy that is a good fit for you? We're all a bit different, and some habits won't work for some people like they will for others. On the other hand, visiting other churches can help us understand our own church liturgy in ways we never really thought about before, making our Sunday morning practices less mere routine and more spiritually-connected routine. These visits can occur frequently if you're not that connected to your current church or not going to church, or they can be more spread out like once every other month or so. Some churches have weekly communal prayers of repentance. I find these quite helpful.

- Finally, be communal with whatever habits you try. With one or two friends or a mentor you can really trust, let them into this part of your life. Another reason we struggle so much with spiritual habits is because we have the insane notion that we have to do it all on our own—just me and God—like if I tell someone I'm going to try to start prayer-walking or whatever, then I'm just bragging and being unspiritual. This is a trick of the Enemy; he knows us well.

I hope this will be a helpful start for you. Please feel free to let me know how things are going, because, yes, I do really like my job. 😊

Blessings to you,
Renea

Wow,

Thank you very much for your suggestions! These sound like great ideas that will work. I'm especially excited to see what kind of churches I can visit – although I love my own church, that I am involved in, I love to see different ways of worshiping. Thank you very much.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2011/04/28/i-dont-feel-connected-to-god/

“Do Non-Christians Have Spiritual Gifts?”

I love your ministry and I find myself going to your website a lot as I prepare for Middle School Sunday School lessons. I am going to be teaching on spiritual gifts to teenagers. My 14-year-old son asked a very astute question. He says he knows some very “gifted” non-Christians at school and wondered if the spiritual gifts are only for those who have been born again or if our purpose in life is intertwined with our spiritual gifts. For example, a non-Christian singer who has been given an excellent voice but is not using it for God.

Thank you for the blessing of encouragement! I'm so glad our website is valuable to you!!

I think one's theology determines the answer. I know lots of

people say that spiritual gifts are only given to the born-again believer as if God has nothing to do with people before they trust Christ.

I don't think it works that way though; I think that since God reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Who created us for the purpose of bringing us into the circle of Their love and delight and pleasure and fellowship, that a case can be made that God is everyone's loving Father ("one God and Father of all," Ephesians 4:6)—but unbelievers don't recognize it. That doesn't make Him NOT our Father; it doesn't make Jesus NOT "the Savior of all men, but especially of believers" (1 Timothy 4:10); it doesn't make the Holy Spirit NOT the giver of good gifts. So I think God lavishes all kinds of gifts on all people, but they are especially expressed more fully in those who are consciously connected to Him. I keep hearing stories from Christians who saw evidence of their spiritual gifts even before they were Christians; after they came into the Kingdom, they knew what they were.

Now there are also natural talents, which are different from spiritual gifts. Singing, for example, is a talent, not a spiritual gift. For one thing, it's not on the lists in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. Secondly, you can lose a singing voice, but Romans 11:29 says that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

Have you seen the spiritual gifts evaluation my husband Ray and I put together?

www.probe.org/how-do-you-determine-your-spiritual-gift/

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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“Can You Have Multiple Besetting Sins and Still Be a Christian?”

I read the [article](#) that you wrote in response to a gentleman who was almost 70, had prostate cancer and stated that a besetting sin he had caused him to doubt his salvation for years. I related to that somewhat, as I am 68 and also have bouts with doubting my salvation. I always wonder if I have repented as I should and have studied about repentance extensively.

My problem is, I think I have more than one besetting sin. I never can understand whether or not a person can have more than one besetting sin and still be a genuine Christian. My major sin is my weight, having struggled with that for years. But I also struggle, though maybe not as bad, with a temper, easily offended, critical and judgmental thoughts of others, am lazy a lot of the time, sometimes watch TV that I shouldn't, and I have negative thoughts of God, and probably others as well. So you see, I am at a loss as to what is going on with me.

I would so much appreciate it if you could help me understand rather or not a true Christian (an individual Christian, not a general group) can have struggles with all kinds of sins, not just one and still truly be a Christian. This is what has haunted me for years, I even gave up the Christian life and went back into the world, I am ashamed to say, but have been back in the church now for 30 years.

I am so sorry for the way your fears have beaten you up and stolen your joy! All Christians struggle against our flesh,

and we all have a number of sin patterns. That's just the way the brokenness of sin plays out in our lives. It's not that you have more sin patterns than other Christians—it's that you are more aware of your own than of mine, or your pastor's, or anyone else's. Everyone has multiple sin issues. Those that don't think they do, are engaging in the sins of self-deception and pride.

Sin causes such blindness and such brokenness, it's pretty much amazing that we're able to do much that IS right. That's the power of God in our lives.

I love this passage from James Bryan Smith's book *Embracing the Love of God*, in the chapter "Forgiving Ourselves":

[We need to learn] to see ourselves as we truly are. We need to develop a proper identity if we are to forgive ourselves. In today's world, we are prone to viewing ourselves primarily as righteous people who are capable of doing sinful things, as opposed to being sinful people who are capable of doing righteous things. The difference in perspective is monumental.

If I see myself as a righteous person, I expect very little failure. Doing good is what comes naturally to a good person. God, too, I reason, must expect a lot of success from me. Failure, sin, and error occur only when I lose focus, only when I am lazy. If I work hard enough, I can live flawlessly. God is not particularly pleased when I do something good, some act of kindness or courage, because that is what he expected in the first place.

But if I see myself as a weak and broken person, I am not shocked by failure. It does not throw me out of kilter. I certainly do not hope for it, expect it, or easily excuse it, but I am not startled by it. Failure, sin and error do not happen because I get lazy; they are a part of being a fallen

person in a fallen world. God is not shocked by my sin; he knows that I am dust (Ps. 103:14). When I do something courageous, or self-sacrificing, God is pleased. Given all that is against me, a kind act is a thing of awe in God's eyes.

God expects more failure from us than we do from ourselves because God knows who we are. We are not the righteous person who occasionally sins, we are the sinful person who occasionally—by God's grace—gets it right. When we start from this perspective we are released from the bondage of perfectionism and are able to forgive ourselves once and for all. We are to take our cue from him. We may be disappointed with ourselves, but God is not. We may feel like condemning ourselves, but God does not.

Let me encourage you to accept yourself as the flawed but beloved person you are, simply because GOD accepts you fully and completely as the flawed but beloved person you are! He loves us just the way we are, but He loves us too much to let us stay there. That's what sanctification does: it makes messy, broken people over into the image of Jesus. That's the power of Jesus' work on earth . . . that's the power of His love.

Hope you find this helpful in making the decision to accept the grace of God and give it to yourself.

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