

“What’s a Good Book to Give to a Seeker?”

My coworker seems to be searching about religion in general. She is a single mom and I want to provide her a book to gain insight into Christianity and how it will change her life. Something that is simple and easy to read. Do you have any recommendations?

Yes!! Lee Strobel’s excellent book *The Case for Christ*. Your coworker doesn’t need Christianity. . . she needs Jesus. Strobel was a hardened atheist, a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*, who chased down experts who could talk to him about Christ. It not only is very convincing, it’s a wonderful way to walk through his steps toward placing his faith in Christ himself.

I’m glad you asked!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“People in Hell DIE, Not Suffer Forever!”

In answer to the e-mail question [“Are People in Hell Isolated and Alone?”](#) The bible clearly states that the wages of sin is DEATH not eternal life, be it in heaven or hell as you think. Malachi 4:3 plainly says they shall be ashes under our feet. In Is.1:28 “...and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed.” Is.66:17 says “...shall be consumed together, saith the Lord.” Rev 20:9 “...and fire came down from God out of

heaven, and devoured them.” Rev 20:14 “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” Doesn’t say second life but second death. You should look up some of the Greek and Hebrew words that have been translated into hell, that would make it more clear to you.

Thank you for your letter. You are correct in noting that the fate of unbelievers is one of heated debate these days, even among professing evangelicals. My own difficulty with the thesis of conditional immortality stems from passages like Matthew 25:46, Revelation 14:9-11 and Revelation 20:10. It is difficult for me to see how these passages can be consistent with the denial of eternal punishment.

For example, in Matthew 25:46 Jesus states: “And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” The same Greek term, *aionion* (eternal), is used to describe both punishment and life.

Revelation 14:11 reads in part: “And the smoke from their torture will go up forever and ever, and those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night.” What troubles me about this verse is the concluding phrase, “those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night.” Again, these unfortunate people appear to be enduring eternal, conscious torment.

Finally, in Revelation 20:10 we read: “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are too, and they will be tormented there day and night forever and ever.” The beast and false prophet are both human beings. And yet, along with the devil, they will endure eternal punishment. Furthermore, Revelation 19:20 states, “Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf—signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with

sulfur.” Please note that this takes place prior to the thousand year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:1-7). And yet, when the thousand years are over, the beast and false prophet are still being tormented in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). This lake of fire is the same place where all unbelievers are thrown in Revelation 20:15.

It’s true that this is called the “second death,” but does the Bible equate “death” with “annihilation”? How do you read Ephesians 2:1-2? The Ephesians were formerly “dead.” But does this mean that they didn’t have personal, conscious existence? Wouldn’t you agree that the Ephesians were spiritually dead (i.e. separated from the spiritual life of God)? And might this not also be what the Bible means by the “second death” (i.e. unremedied spiritual death results in eternal separation from God)? When the Bible speaks of death it does not mean “annihilation.” Rather, it means “separation.”

Physical death is the “separation” of the spirit from the body (James 2:26). Spiritual death is the “separation” of a conscious, living person from God (Ephesians 2:1-2). And the second death is the “eternal separation” of an unredeemed person from God (Revelation 20:11-15).

This, at any rate, is why it’s so difficult for me to embrace the doctrines of conditional immortality and annihilationism.

Hope this helps.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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“How was Salvation Achieved Before Christ?”

How was salvation achieved prior to the Resurrection of Christ and the spreading of Christianity?

Salvation has always been a gift of God's grace, received by faith alone. While today believers look back to the death and resurrection of Christ as that which makes God's gift of salvation possible, before the time of Christ believers looked forward to the coming of a Savior. This Savior, or Deliverer, would be of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; Gen. 15:6), and the seed of David (2 Sam. 7:12-17; see also Matt. 1:1-17). He was prefigured in the Passover (Exod. 12), the offerings in Leviticus 1-5, the Tabernacle, and the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), just to name a few. Furthermore, He was prophesied by Isaiah, Micah, and many others. Thus, before the coming of Christ, the CONTENT of saving faith (i.e. what someone was to believe in order to be saved) may have been somewhat different (depending on the extent of God's revelation to that point in history), but the OBJECT of saving faith has always been God and His faithful promises revealed in Scripture. This is why Paul is able to hold up Abraham as a model of faith for the first century Christians in Rome (see Romans 4). As Paul points out, all the way back in Gen. 15:6 we read of Abraham, "Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." In other words, Abraham was saved by grace, through faith, just as we are today.

God bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

“Why Do We Pray at All if God Already Has a Plan?”

For as long as I can remember, I've always thought that God has a purpose for everything. Everything happens for a reason, whether this event is good or bad. Is this a good assumption?

Although rarely do I pray for gifts or anything to happen, it occurred to me that this is a pretty common practice. Last night my Bible-study group prayed for the safe trip of a friend to a missions trip in Europe, but lately, I've been wondering this... if indeed God has a purpose for everything, then if my friend didn't have a safe flight to Europe (really worried about my friend here), then God willed it and there's a larger purpose for that. This, for me, answers “why good things happen to bad people,” and I can accept that, but my real question is why do we pray at all? Why do we pray for certain events to steer a certain direction if God has a plan for it to go either way and it'll happen according to plan anyway regardless of what we ask? Does that make sense? .. or am I looking at this completely skewed? Please help.

For as long as I can remember, I've always thought that God has a purpose for everything. Everything happens for a reason, whether this event is good or bad. Is this a good assumption?

Yes, it is, because the Bible teaches us that God is sovereign—He is in control over everything that happens. Things may not be God's first choice, for example when we sin, but He is powerful enough that He can make good come out of evil.

Although rarely do I pray for gifts or anything to happen, it occurred to me that this is a pretty common practice. Last night my Bible-study group prayed for the safe trip of a friend to a missions trip in Europe, but lately, I've been wondering this... if indeed God has a purpose for everything, then if my friend didn't have a safe flight to Europe (really worried about my friend here), then God willed it and there's a larger purpose for that. This, for me, answers "why good things happen to bad people," and I can accept that, but my real question is why do we pray at all?

If we look at what the Lord Jesus taught us about prayer, we see that it's about aligning ourselves with God's kingdom, with His values, and with His character. I like the word "align" because I think it accurately reflects what we need to do in light of the effects of the fall, when we were all plunged into a state of sin. This means we are out of alignment with God and prefer instead to indulge our own desires. Just as we sometimes have to take our cars into the shop to get our wheels realigned when they "want to" go in a different direction than the designers' intent, prayer is about submitting ourselves to God, aligning ourselves with Him and His purposes. So prayer isn't mainly about telling God what we want so He can give us our heart's desire, it's supposed to be about submitting to His will even as we share our desires with Him, with the understanding that if He wants something different and better than what we want, we acknowledge that He has the right to do whatever He wants because He is God and we are not.

We pray to communicate with God, because communication is an absolutely essential part of maintaining a relationship. And Christianity is about relationship with God, not rules and rituals. We pray because He invited us to ask Him for whatever we want, just like He invited Solomon to ask for whatever he wanted, and hopefully that kind of divine generosity and open-heartedness will call us to ask thoughtfully, like Solomon,

with an awareness of how big and powerful and loving God is. We pray because we are and can do nothing without God and we need Him desperately. We pray because it reminds us that we are completely dependent on God like American astronauts are dependent on NASA to keep them alive up in space. We pray because it reminds us of our relative size and position before God.

Why do we pray for certain events to steer a certain direction if God has a plan for it to go either way and it'll happen according to plan anyway regardless of what we ask? Does that make sense? .. or am I looking at this completely skewed? Please help.

Well, if you read the prayers of the apostle Paul in the New Testament, you see that he didn't spend a lot of time praying for things to go a certain way. He certainly prayed about his hopes and intentions, such as his desire to go into Asia to preach the gospel, but the Holy Spirit told him no, which he humbly accepted (Acts 16) because he lived his life in an attitude of submission and obedience. I think the wisest course of action is to lift events and concerns into God's hands, telling Him what we would like and then yielding to Him about the whole thing. Which is the pattern we see modeled by the Lord Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane the night before He died. He poured out His heart to the Father, asking Him if there was ANY way to escape the cup of suffering before Him, but yielding by saying, "Yet not My will, but Thine be done." I think that cultivating an attitude of "Thy will be done" is the most important part of prayer. That goes along with Paul's admonition of how to pray in Philippians 4:6 when he says to "let your requests be made known to God." We don't demand, we offer our requests, leaving them in the hands of a God who knows what is best and loves us perfectly.

God is sovereign and yet when we pray it makes a difference. Jesus invited us to take His yoke upon us, which makes us not

only His companions but co-laborers in the kingdom. I think that praying keeps us connected to our Source, Jesus, so it is a way to keep on abiding in Him and allowing Him to abide in us. So we pray not to get what we want out of God like some cosmic vending machine, but to keep us connected to and dependent on Him, which is what we were created for in the first place.

I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“Is it Wrong to Speak of God as Jehovah?”

Is it wrong to speak of God as Jehovah? I stumbled across a teaching regarding the Jehovah Witnesses and discovered that the word Jehovah is a wrong pronunciation of the Hebrew word YAHWEH. It could be that I misunderstood the statement. I am talking about your article, [Witnessing to the Witnesses](#).

Secondly, I would like to compliment you on the wonderful information that is available on your site. Your teachings are outstanding.

Thank you for your letter and your encouragement. It is good to see Christians studying the Word of God and learning to share their faith. Although Jehovah is not a word, it is not wrong to use it for God. Although mistaken, it was an attempt to address the God of Israel. Remember, the God of Israel has many titles, not just one. He is also called King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the First and the Last, the Rock, The Shepherd,

Father, I Am, Lord of Glory, etc... Jehovah was another one of the titles. Keep on studying the word and witnessing for Jesus.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

Please refer to related articles below.

“Your Critique of Sociobiology Makes No Sense”

Perhaps I have severely misunderstood your [critique on sociobiology](#), but as I interpreted it, it makes no sense. From the sociobiologist proposition that all human nature and behavior is shaped solely by evolutionary necessity (and what promotes reproduction and survival), it does not follow, as you have asserted, that any significant hope and meaning in life is precluded. I don't know what kind of a faculty member you were talking to, but the question you posed (“What difference does it make if I've reproduced once I'm dead?”) is an easy one to answer. The goal of humanity, as believed by sociobiologists, is to pass on its genetic legacy. No single organism is particularly important, but only the collaborative propagation of a species of its genes. Therefore, the difference of whether or not one has reproduced by the time of death is a crucial one. One who dies and leaves no offspring does not pass on any genetic legacy, and is truly, in an evolutionary sense, dead. Those who do leave offspring and die are able to, in an evolutionary sense, live on vicariously through the genes that they pass on to their young, and the genetic legacy continues.

In response to the philosopher's division of life purpose into 'small letters' (survival/reproduction) and 'capital letters' (ultimate meaning and significance, whatever that means), the sociobiological assertion is that survival and reproduction is the ultimate meaning and significance of life. I think one of your crucial errors is that you assume that knowledge of the cause and origins of human nature actually change the validity of human nature itself, and somehow make our ambitions less "lofty. Well, our nature is what it is and we do what we do. We love our children and spouses with all our hearts, and if we do so only for the sake of evolutionary efficacy, than so be it, but our feelings do not therefore become false and invalid. We at times act selflessly and help others at the expense of ourselves. But if this behavior is ultimately 'genetically selfish,' ostensibly helping others while really benefiting ourselves, than so be it, but these feelings are nevertheless meaningful. A principal proposition of sociobiology is that we have motives to act of which we are not always consciously aware. That does not mean they do not exist, and if they do exist, then following them does not make our lives inherently worthless.

Perhaps the sociobiological argument is not particularly aesthetically pleasing (which I think is really your main objection), but this is not by any means grounds for a scientific rebuttal.

Sincerely and respectfully,

_____, Ph.D.

I believe you are the first to question my critique along these lines. I will attempt to answer your objections in the body of your initial message.

Perhaps I have severely misunderstood your critique on sociobiology, but as I interpreted it, it makes no sense. From the sociobiologist proposition that all human nature and behavior is shaped solely by evolutionary necessity (and what

promotes reproduction and survival), it does not follow, as you have asserted, that any significant hope and meaning in life is precluded. I don't know what kind of a faculty member you were talking to,

He was the head of the department of ecology and evolution.

but the question you posed ("what difference does it make if I've reproduced once I'm dead?") is an easy one to answer.

To be clear, my question was "Once I am dead and in the ground (implying that in a naturalistic worldview since there is no afterlife, my life is absolutely over), what difference does it make to me NOW?"

The goal of humanity, as believed by sociobiologists, is to pass on its genetic legacy. No single organism is particularly important,

Precisely why I made my question very personal.

but only the collaborative propagation of a species of its genes. Therefore, the difference of whether or not one has reproduced by the time of death is a crucial one.

Not to the species but to me, but I no longer exist.

One who dies and leaves no offspring does not pass on any genetic legacy, and is truly, in an evolutionary sense, dead.

So what? My genes are not me, they are just molecules. If, as E. O. Wilson summarized in *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, The organism is just DNA's way of making more DNA, then I don't really matter anyway. And once I am dead and no longer exist (organism), nothing makes any difference to me since I do not exist. That is why the professor said that "ultimately"

it doesn't really matter. He got the gist of my question.

Those who do leave offspring and die are able to, in an evolutionary sense, live on vicariously through the genes that they pass on to their young, and the genetic legacy continues.

I don't live vicariously in my genes. They are now part of a new unique creature that combines my genes with a woman's genes in a new and totally unique combination. Even a clone would not be exactly "me" since mutations and recombinations would have occurred, erasing my genetic identity.

In response to the philosopher's division of life purpose into 'small letters' (survival/reproduction) and 'capital letters' (ultimate meaning and significance, whatever that means),

Some meaning for existence beyond the mere physical.

the sociobiological assertion is that survival and reproduction is the ultimate meaning and significance of life.

But as I state in the article, without some meaning for life that arises outside of ourselves, there is no meaning in small letters. If we are just molecules, then that's it! We are just molecules, nothing more can be said about us. How those molecules get arranged or persist or are annihilated is totally irrelevant to the ongoing history of the universe. Nothing cares and nothing therefore matters.

I think one of your crucial errors is that you assume that knowledge of the cause and origins of human nature actually change the validity of human nature itself, and somehow make our ambitions less "lofty."

How can this not be so? From Darwin to today, evolution is

said to be without direction and without purpose and we are mere accidents of history. This is not a conclusion of evidence, but of philosophy. For many it is a specific attempt to remove any form of God from the equation of who we are and where we came from. Once that is done we are free to make our own rules. When Richard Dawkins writes that Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist, he means it, at least partially, for the purpose of the freedom from any kind of imposed morality. Dawkin's watchmaker is not only blind, but totally without sympathy to whatever outcome comes about through natural selection. Specifically as to whether I reproduce or not.

Well, our nature is what it is and we do what we do. We love our children and spouses with all our hearts, and if we do so only for the sake of evolutionary efficacy, than so be it, but our feelings do not therefore become false and invalid.

Certainly it becomes false and invalid, because I am only being manipulated by my genes which have been formed by thousands of generations. I am not really choosing, just reacting according the program established by natural selection.

We at times act selflessly and help others at the expense of ourselves. But if this behavior is ultimately 'genetically selfish,' ostensibly helping others while really benefiting ourselves, than so be it, but these feelings are nevertheless meaningful.

How can they be "meaningful" if they are ultimately selfish and not altruistic at all? That's why Trivers adds the word "reciprocal" in front of the word because simple altruism no longer exists in a sociobiological world.

A principal proposition of sociobiology is that we have motives to act of which we are not always consciously aware.

That does not mean they do not exist, and if they do exist, then following them does not make our lives inherently worthless.

Certainly they exist, but their source is crucially important. If I pull the string on a Chatty Cathy doll and she says, "I love you," does she really love me? Of course not. But we are no different according to sociobiology. We are both complex arrangements of molecules uttering responses based on an internal program conditioned to respond to outside stimuli (pulling a string or gazing at our newborn's cute and cuddly face).

Perhaps the sociobiological argument is not particularly aesthetically pleasing (which I think is really your main objection), but this is not by any means grounds for a scientific rebuttal.

Indeed, it is not aesthetically pleasing, but sometimes truth is hard to take, agreed. But that is not my problem. There is no purpose beyond survival and reproduction which is merely an illusion perpetrated on us by our brains which has been constructed by natural selection to simply aid survival and reproduction, not to recognize truth. And our entire body doesn't really matter, just our genes which are simply reproducing themselves because that's just what DNA does. But DNA is just a mindless molecule with no purpose or goal or direction. How then can we have any?

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.
Probe Ministries

“I’m Depressed; What Causes Happiness?”

I am depressed right now and so is my friend. What causes happiness? I don’t want the chemical description, but what stuff, like situations and actions, causes happiness? I know that the Bible says that just because we are Christians, doesn’t mean we won’t suffer. But how would I get out of depression? I don’t want an answer like read your Bible and pray, because I do that every night, and here I am still depressed. There’s no fun in life anymore, and somewhere along the line, I lost the fire of the Spirit. I wish I could get it back.

I realize yours is a very serious question, and having walked through deep depression with our son several years ago, I would be the LAST person to give you the cliché of “read your Bible and pray more.”

Sometimes, depression is caused by a brain chemical imbalance. In that case, medications are the best way to adjust the brain chemistry. Sometimes, depression is caused by unconfessed sin. That needs to be faced, repented of, and confessed, both to God and to other people. Sometimes, depression is caused by loss and sorrow. The way out of that kind of depression is to embrace the grieving process. That means facing and feeling the pain of loss and grief so that you can let go of it. (That also means crying, yelling, journaling one’s feelings, or all of the above.)

One very wise person has said that an intrinsic part of happiness is having something to look forward to. I have found this to be true.

So what causes happiness? Generally speaking, it’s:

- cultivating a positive attitude (This is admittedly harder

for people with melancholy temperaments.)

- not having anything sad going on
- the presence of something worth anticipating
- having friends; healthy relationships is an important part of happiness

And probably the most important thing I have to offer you is the suggestion that you cultivate a grateful heart. People who get in the habit of looking for and expressing gratitude for the small and large blessings of life find themselves in better physical and emotional health. One of the best things you can do for yourself right now is to invest in a small notebook and write in your "Gratitude Journal" every single night before going to bed. Write down ten things you are grateful for, things in which God showed you He loves you, things that went well during the day. Things like parts of your body that work and aren't in pain. Things that are easy to take for granted but which you would REALLY miss if they went away tomorrow, like your bed, running water, electricity, heating and air conditioning, having transportation, paved roads, lungs that breathe for you without having to think about it. . . you get the picture?

Usually, I suggest people write down three things, but if you're really struggling with depression, ten will help more. It will help you focus on the many, many good things in your life instead of focusing on the flatness and darkness of your depression.

Let me know several months down the road how you're doing, OK?

Sue Bohlin

“What Do You Think of Willow Creek?”

What do you think of the Willow Creek church model that so many churches are following?

Thank you for your thoughtful question. It is a common question today in light of the success that Willow Creek has enjoyed in the Chicago area and the emulation of that model around the world. The same concerns have arisen around Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in California. (He is also the author of the best-seller *The Purpose Driven Life*.) Before I go much further in my response to your question I should let you know that I am an elder in a church that, in general, looks favorably on what these churches are attempting to do, although I have reservations about some of the particulars in their implementation. With that said, I should add that I believe that it is unwise to ever try to replicate what another church is doing in a wholesale manner. This indicates a dependency on technique over trust in God's Spirit to build His church in a given location.

As is usually the case, this issue has to do with deeper concerns than just the music that is heard on Sunday or the preaching style of the pastor. The question at the heart of the issue is whether or not God has ordained both the *forms* of worship, teaching, and church structure, or only the *functions* of the New Testament church. I tend to think that scripture focuses on the functions of the church and that we are free to establish culturally appropriate forms to accomplish them with. As we like to say at our church, we are not a seeker church, a Willow Creek church, a charismatic church, or a Bible church. We are a church that incarnates Christ in the town of McKinney, TX. Our goal is to help people follow Christ, and we will use music, teaching styles and programs that accomplish that task. Our teaching will be biblical and

challenging, touching both the hearts and minds of our congregation. We desire to use the best music, both old and new, in genres that speak to the people walking through our doors.

The outcome over the last seven years has been encouraging. People are trusting in Christ and being baptized, they are growing in knowledge and grace, they are giving sacrificially and becoming involved in missions, and they are reaching out to the community in significant ways. Our numerical growth has been significant, but the spiritual growth of individuals is what has encouraged me the most.

If you are interested in reading more about the relationship between form and function within the New Testament church, let me recommend a book that might be helpful: *Sharpening The Focus Of The Church* by Gene Getz (Victor Books, 1984).

Sincerely,

Don Closson
Probe Ministries

“There Is No Evidence for God or the Bible”

I read your article about the [evidence for God's existence](#). Although it was an interesting article, I didn't really see any evidence of God's existence in the article. I am a believer in God's existence. However, my belief is strictly faith based. I suppose it is possible that God does not exist. I choose to believe that he does. There are many things in the world we live in and our Universe that are truly amazing and

unexplainable. But just because something is strange, amazing, awesome, mind boggling or unexplainable, does not mean it is evidence of God's existence.

Just like the existence of God cannot be proven, the Holy Bible itself can not be proven that it is the inspired word of God. There simply is no evidence. It is faith that people have in that it is the word of God. It can never be proven. This is very hard for many Christians to accept, but it is the undeniable truth. You believe because you choose to believe and for no other reason.

I think perhaps you misunderstand the difference between evidence and proof. I agree with you that we do not have proof of God's existence or that the Bible is the Word of God. However, what we do have is very powerful evidence that choosing to put our trust in God in His word is a reasonable choice.

Recently my husband was up on the roof of our house putting up Christmas lights. From inside the house, I heard noises above my head that sounded like footsteps. And when I looked out the window, I saw a man's shadow on the ground that indicated there was a person on the roof. Since Ray had told me he was going up on the roof, I believed he was up there. Could I prove it from inside the house? No, but it was completely reasonable for me to look at the evidence and conclude my husband was putting up Christmas lights.

Sometimes people look evidence full in the face and then deny it. Our founder, Jimmy Williams, is fond of telling the story of the man who went to a psychiatrist convinced that he was dead. The psychiatrist was unsuccessful at talking him out of his illusion. Finally he asked him, "Do dead men bleed?" The patient said no, they don't. The psychiatrist pulled out his Swiss army knife, reached over and nicked the man's finger. Amazed, the patient exclaimed, "Well, how about that! Dead men DO bleed!"

See the difference between evidence and proof?

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“Why Wouldn’t God Let Me Commit Suicide?”

Hi Sue,

I just read your article [Do People Who Commit Suicide Go to Hell?](#). I believe everything you say to be true and biblical...and then I get stuck.

I have bi-polar depression, I thank God that I am now stable, but last year there were many times when I seriously considered suicide. I believe in God, His grace, and Christ’s death for all sinners, and I believe, like Romans 8 says that we can never be separated from Him – but my one question is, “Why am I still here? Wouldn’t it have been/be much easier to die and be with Him in His glory for eternity?” I mean I’m not sure that the suffering is worth it...

I believe God kept me from suicide...but I still wonder if it’s so easy to be with Him (in death) then where’s the catch?

Dear _____,

Bless your heart. I have friends who are bipolar and we have gone through some DEEP depression with our son over this.

What’s the catch, you ask?

Well, to make what’s probably a weak analogy, are you familiar

with the NBA draft that has signed young basketball players just out of high school? Oh wait, I see you are in another country. Oh well—I bet you can appreciate it anyway. . . There is a promise of money and fame and glory for these young athletes, so why “waste” their time in college when they could be making big bucks playing basketball? Sounds good—only, they are too young to appreciate the maturing process that happens in college. So often, they crash and burn once they turn professional because they’re not ready. The trials of being a college student, it turns out, are deeply beneficial for maturity and character development; they prepare students for life as professional athletes.

Our life on earth isn’t a holding tank or a detention center where we impatiently wait out our time until we’re given a “green light” to die and go to heaven. (I know, it’s easy to think of it this way, particularly for sensitive people who really hate living in a fallen world.) God’s purpose in leaving us on earth once we are saved is to grow holiness and maturity and strength in us, a process that would be short-circuited by an early death. It would mean we enter heaven in a state of “arrested development,” so to speak. Since the scriptures speak of being given power, authority and responsibilities in heaven, the only place and time we have to develop our stewardship is here on earth.

I understand your feelings of not being sure if the suffering is worth it, but that’s because of not having an adequate view of God and of heaven and of your future, not to mention not understanding the value of suffering. (If I may be so bold as to recommend my own article on that subject. . . it’s the best thing I’ve ever written: [“The Value of Suffering.”](#))

Yes, it would be a lot easier to be in heaven than to continue to live in a fallen world and a fallen body on earth, but God isn’t into “easy,” God is passionately committed to fashioning us into the image of His Son. I’m afraid there are no shortcuts, but you can be assured that every difficult day you

endure, every trial and every heartache, is being used to achieve that "weight of glory" in you (2 Cor. 4:17). God never wastes suffering, not a scrap of it. He redeems all of it for His glory and our blessing. Every single tear you have shed is so precious to your heavenly Father that He has them stored in a heavenly bottle. He hasn't turned away or forgotten you.

_____, I pray you will know His comfort and peace like a warm blanket enveloping your soul.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

(Follow-up e-mail from Sue)

I have continued to think about your question and my answer, and the Lord put it on my heart to send you a P.S.

I have a young friend (early 20's) who attempted suicide several years ago but survived. She couldn't understand why God didn't just take her to heaven, either. Why wouldn't He honor her (seemingly) reasonable request to be with Him in glory?

Well, not too long after her suicide attempt she met a wonderful man, got married, and just had a precious little baby. On both her wedding day and then especially when she first held her newborn infant in her arms, she was overwhelmed with thanksgiving that God DIDN'T take her home to be with Him when she wanted it. She realized that God still had blessings to lavish on her that couldn't come in heaven. As a cystic fibrosis patient, she understands that she also has certain trials and pain ahead of her, but the joy far outshines the darkness.

This brings up one of answers to the question, What is the purpose of life? –For God to bring glory to Himself by lavishing His love and grace on us. All of creation, including

the unseen realities in the heavenlies, is given the opportunity to see evidence of God's character and heart as He pours out His blessings on the people He made in His image. And that's one of the reasons why so many people who have been tempted to kill themselves are prevented from doing so—because God still has blessings in store and we need to be HERE on earth to receive them.

Warmly,

Sue