

The Keys to Emotional Healing

– Part 1

After seeing God bring about major transformation of emotional healing in a number of broken people, I asked Him what was happening when He healed people's hearts. I wanted to understand the process. His answer was simple and profound, but never easy: "grieving and forgiving."

Both of these emotional disciplines are necessary to move from the place of sustaining a wound to the soul, to the place where that wound no longer controls and diminishes us—because it has been transformed into a healed scar.

Grieving means moving pain and anger from the inside to the outside. Tears are God's lubricant for that process, and what a gift of grace tears are. They are a physical manifestation of emotional pain, and when we weep—whether silent tears rolling down our cheeks or huge wracking sobs that exhaust us—the pain leaves our soul as it leaves the body.

One of my friends was so deeply wounded as a child by various kinds of abuse that in order to survive, her personality splintered into several "alters." (Multiple personality disorder is now called DID, Dissociative Identity Disorder.) One day in therapy, as she cried while talking about the pain inside, she reached for the box of tissues to blot the tears. Abruptly, she "switched" to another alter who said to the therapist, "Don't let her use the Kleenex. We need to feel the tears rolling down her cheeks. That's what healing feels like." When she told me this, it resonated deeply with me as true, and I started paying attention to how the feeling of tears on my face nourishes my soul, regardless of the reason for them. (Specks of dust under my contacts notwithstanding!)

In many cases, grieving also requires getting angry. Anger as

a response to a violation of our dignity as people made in God's image, to shaming or disrespect, to neglect or abuse, is a healthy reaction. It says, "You treated me as worthless when I have great value as God's beloved child. You dishonored me AND you dishonored God." We can express anger in constructive and destructive ways, and of course it's always better to choose a constructive expression! We see the Lord Jesus constructively channeling His anger as He fashioned a whip before cleansing the temple (John 2:15). Some people have punched pillows, or hammered nails into pieces of wood, or torn down something slated for demolition. Others have screamed out their anger and grief in a safe place. Punching bags are a helpful place to discharge anger. And one of the most powerful ways to release anger is to create a list of all the ways someone has hurt us, and the impact of their choices and actions on us, and then talk to that person in an empty chair. We say—or yell or scream—the things we would want to say if we could duct-tape the person into the chair so they couldn't leave, if they *had* to listen to us. And we go down the list, one item at a time, telling them everything they need to know about what they did and how it affected us. Often it's unwise, if not impossible, to actually dump all that anger on the actual person, but it's amazingly healing to speak out the pain and anger with our words. Out loud. Emphasis on LOUD, if need be!

Once we have grieved the hurt, the next step is letting go: forgiving. Forgiving is like pulling out the soul-splinter that is causing pain and the emotional "pus" that accumulates from unresolved pain and anger. (Grieving discharges this emotional pus.) Forgiving releases the person who hurt us into the Lord's care, for *Him* to deal with.

I'll explain more about forgiving in my next blog post, [The Keys to Emotional Healing – Part 2](#).

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Giving Thanks in a Hard Place

My husband and I are ministering in part of the former Soviet Union while I've been reading Ann Voskamp's book *One Thousand Gifts*. She focuses on seeing and living life through the filter of *eucharisteo*, the Greek word for "giving thanks." The title refers to the fact that she recorded a thousand little ways in which God revealed Himself and His goodness to her, most of which were a pleasure to receive, some of which were painful. She worked to practice gratitude, which not only built her faith but also made her aware of how deeply she was loved.

This is a physically and spiritually challenging place to be, so I've had many opportunities to practice *eucharisteo* here. I find that multiplying the "thank Yous" keeps my heart tender and makes me aware of how comfortable and privileged is my life in America.

Thank You that the tap water is not safe to drink. But I thank You that safe bottled water is easy to obtain at the little market a block away. I thank You that my husband is more than willing to walk to the market so I don't have to. I thank You that replenishing the bottled water at the Bible College where we teach is a high priority, especially since it's so dry here that we need to keep drinking from our water bottles all day long. Speaking of which, thank You for my Aquafina bottle that Ray bought me at the Dallas airport. The whole label is in English!

Thank You that this is a handicap-unfriendly country, that there are stairs everywhere and elevators only in buildings over five stories high. Thank You that there's no point to bringing my scooter or wheelchair. Thank You that at home, I have plenty of mobility assistance. Thank you for the Americans with Disabilities Act. Thank You for allowing me to live in a country that is mainly accessible to polio survivors like me. Thank You for Lufthansa Airlines, which takes such good care of people who can't walk (or walk long distances) once I get to Germany next week.

Thank You that I got strep the day *before* we left Dallas and not *the morning of* our flight here! Thank You that my doctor could see me on short notice. Thank You for antibiotics that knocked it out immediately. Thank You for protecting our health while we are here.

Thank You that languages were splintered at the tower of Babel and we are surrounded by Slavic tongues we do not speak. Thank You for providing several gifted translators. Thank You for patience on the part of our friends here when we try to make our mouths produce unfamiliar, strange-sounding words. Thank You that in heaven, we will not need translators because we will all speak the language of the Lamb.

Thank You for churches with outhouses rather than heated indoor restrooms. Thank You that we are using them at the end of March rather than in January! Thank You for bathrooms at home with indoor plumbing, flush toilets, and flushable toilet paper. And thank You that our bathrooms don't stink.

Thank You that our luggage was delayed on the way here. But thank You for getting it to us only 24 hours later! Thank You for the lesson about what to include in my carry-on. I didn't learn that lesson when we were stranded for four days by the [Iceland ash cloud](#) two years ago, and I thank You for giving me another chance to learn the importance of packing a nightgown and a change of clothes and anything else I really need.

Thank You for sheets that don't cover the mattress and come undone every night. Thank You for fitted bottom sheets on all our beds in our home. Thank You for top sheets with plenty of width and length.

I've never thanked You for many of these things, Lord, and I am so grateful for them now!

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Forgive Myself?

Have you ever been told how important it is to forgive yourself?

I know Christians who have struggled with doing this, some for several years, unable to get a handle on it. There's good reason for that—scripture never even mentions forgiving ourselves, much less commanding it. I understand the idea of giving oneself forgiveness comes from humanistic psychology; doctors know that experiencing forgiveness is an essential part of mental health, but where do you find forgiveness when God, the source of forgiveness, has been excluded from the big picture?

You forgive yourself. At least, that's the way it should work in principle. When God is "Xed out." But, as many have learned, just deciding to forgive yourself sounds easier than actually doing it. On what basis do you forgive yourself? Just because? How many times do you need to beat yourself up before it's time for forgive yourself? What if you forgive yourself

prematurely, before you've beaten yourself up enough?

What a mess.

I've also heard Christians say, "I know God has forgiven me, but I just can't forgive myself." It sounds quite humble, but in reality, this is upside-down pride. The underlying message is, "God may have forgiven me, but my own standards of what constitutes forgiveness are higher than God's, and my standard is what counts."

So what do we do when we're still keeping ourselves on the hook for past sins?

First, by faith receive the forgiveness that God has already granted. This has nothing to do with *feeling* forgiven and everything to do with choosing to trust that God keeps His word: "But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God has already forgiven every sin we have ever committed and ever will. He waits for us to gratefully choose to receive His amazing grace of forgiveness. *"Lord Jesus, thank You for paying my debt for my sin and restoring me to relationship with the Father. Thank You for forgiving me. By faith, and in Your strength, I receive Your forgiveness and cleansing."*

Second (if necessary), we choose to take ourselves off the hook and release ourselves from being our own prisoners. We remind ourselves that Jesus said, "If the Son sets you free, you will be really free" (John 8:36). We remind ourselves that His last words on the Cross were "It is finished." His work of freeing us from our sin and making forgiveness possible is finished. Done. Over and out. Which means we can take ourselves off the hook for something Jesus already paid for.

Recently I was teaching on forgiveness and painted a word picture of being handcuffed to the person who had offended us or hurt us. Forgiveness means unlocking the cuff from around

our own wrist and snapping it on Jesus' wrist, giving Him custody of our offender, releasing them into His care. Several people told me, "I realized my prisoner was ME! And Jesus was inviting me to take the handcuffs off myself!" They did, and they were free.

I love the sound of chains falling off and people being set free from their strongholds!

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Glee's Pro-Gay Theology

Feb. 28, 2012

Recently, the wildly popular TV show *Glee*'s Valentine's Day episode featured a group of religious students called the "God Squad" discussing whether they should accept money to sing love songs to gay people (their term). The writers had students spouting pro-gay theology that was doubtless quite persuasive to the majority of viewers who don't know the truth that counters the propaganda.

"They say that one out of every ten people are gay, and if that's true than that means one of the twelve apostles might have been gay."

That's a very old, very inaccurate statistic from Alfred Kinsey. A more accurate estimate is in the 2-3% range.^{[\[1\]](#)} The idea that one of the twelve might have been gay is sheer speculation with no grounding in truth and no evidence for it,

but it certainly planted the idea in the minds of millions of people to normalize it.

“The Bible says it’s an abomination for a man to lay down with another man. But we shared tents in Cub Scouts, and slept next to each other all the time. So that would make Cub Scouts an abomination.”

No. No, it wouldn’t.

What the Bible actually says is, “You shall not lie with a male **as one lies with a female**; it is an abomination” (Lev 18:22). This passage is talking about same-sex intercourse, not guys in sleeping bags sharing a tent.

Further, it’s always important to look at the context of any verse. That same chapter contains prohibitions against sexual activity we still condemn today: incest, bestiality and adultery. Those who want to dismiss verses prohibiting same-sex relations as archaic usually (but not always!) won’t take a pro-incest, pro-adultery, or pro-bestiality stance. Neither should it be okay to take a pro-homosexuality stance.

My friend Randy Thomas had a powerful “lightbulb moment” concerning this verse. He writes,

“The Father brought back the memory of Ron, the first man I thought I loved, and me together as a couple. In my memory we were in an embrace and I saw the Lord standing next to us. We were oblivious to His presence and He was grieving. His grief was so bitter I could see Him shaking with tears as He looked upon us. I was immediately struck with grief that God was so grieved. It’s a grief I will never forget.

“At that point I felt the Spirit asking me, ‘Randy . . . what is the sin?’ The only Scripture I knew was Leviticus 18:22 (that’s only because it was on the signs that the Christians held up at pride parades and outside of clubs). I told the Lord that I didn’t like that Scripture. But He persisted,

'What is the sin?' I thought through the verse again: 'When one man lies with another as a woman it is an abomination before the Lord,' (emphasis mine). The word 'it' jumped out at me. I sensed the Spirit asking, 'What is "it"?''

"I answered, 'A gender neutral pronoun?' I was a little surprised that in the middle of this powerful time the Holy Spirit would be giving me an English pop quiz. I felt Him say, 'EXACTLY!!!'"

"Then my world fell apart over one little word. 'It' meant that I was not the abomination, Ron was not the abomination. It was the abomination – the act itself was keeping Ron and me looking toward each other and not to God for fulfillment of who we were and what God intended. For the first time in my life I knew that God is aware of every secret and not-so-secret thing I have done. Instead of sending hellfire and brimstone, He sent a grieving Savior to pay the price of my ignorance and sin."

"He forgave and redeemed me."

"You know what else the Bible says is an abomination—eating lobster, planting different crops in the same field, giving somebody a proud look. Not an abomination? Slavery. Jesus never said anything about gay people."

There are different kinds of laws in the Old Testament. Civil and ceremonial laws, such as those concerning religious sacrifices and dietary laws, were time-bound and limited to the people of Israel. They are no longer in force for a variety of reasons: first, all the OT sacrifices and ceremonies were given as a foreshadowing of the Messiah's ministry and of His death, burial and resurrection. They are no longer necessary because they were the preparation for the Reality that has come. Second, the civil laws pertained to a nation of people who no longer exist. (The current nation of Israel is a political one, not the same as the group of OT

people God called to follow Him alone as their Ruler.)

Moral laws, such the Ten Commandments and all the laws constraining sexual immorality, are not time-bound because they are rooted in the character of God. It is always sinful to have sex with someone you're not married to, regardless of gender.

Slavery, as ugly as it is, is not inherently unnatural the way homosexual practice is. Dr. Robert Gagnon, a theologian who has a breathtaking understanding of homosexuality and its attendant arguments, writes, "The Bible accommodates to social systems where sometimes the only alternative to starvation is enslavement. But it clearly shows a critical edge by specifying mandatory release dates and the right of kinship buyback; requiring that Israelites not be treated as slaves; and reminding Israelites that God had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt."[\[2\]](#)

We don't know that "Jesus never said anything about gay people"; it's quite possible that His comments on eunuchs in Matthew 19 included those who would have never sex with women because of their same-sex attractions.

Usually, the argument goes, "Jesus never said anything about homosexuality." What He DID say about God's intention for His creation and sexuality in Mark 10:6-8 excludes homosexuality, along with other forms of sexual sin such as polyamory, incest and bestiality. Scripture powerfully indicates His intention for a male-female prerequisite for sexuality.

"Love is love" (so let's sing a love song to two lesbian students)

Is it? How would the "God Squad" feel about singing a love song to a woman committing adultery with one of their dads? How would they feel about a father paying them to sing a love song to the daughter he's regularly raping while calling it love? Our culture is so anxious to justify anything by

slapping the label of “love” on it that we dishonor the God who IS love: a sacrificial, others-centered, giving love that took Him to the cross to pay for the very sins that are being elevated and celebrated on network TV.

Notes

1. For citations, see my article on the Probe Ministries website “[Homosexual Myths](#).”

2.

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/03/03/my-take-the-bible-really-does-condemn-homosexuality/>

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What Does Grace Look Like?

Grace is one of those theological words that we *think* we know and understand, but many people don’t really grasp because they’ve never seen it modeled. Grace is what Mark Driscoll calls “ill-deserved” favor; it is the display of unwarranted kindness and love.

I’ve been writing a radio program (the transcript of which will become a [web article](#)) for Probe Ministries on grace. So for the last few months I’ve been paying attention to people’s stories of grace, jotting them down so I wouldn’t forget (because [I leak](#)!). What a blessing it has been to record these stories in my Day-Timer, of receiving grace from God both directly, and from Him through other people.

Personal Grace Straight From God

- The rain holds off till the second you get in the car, when

a torrential downpour starts.

- Traffic lights turn or stay green, one after another, when you're running late. Especially when the timing of traffic lights doesn't usually work like that.
- You "just happen" to notice the stove burner still on when you're about to head out the door.
- You leave your car keys in the ignition, with the car still on, as you go into church—and the car is still there when you get back.
- You are rejected by the only college you wanted, scrambling to find a second choice and not enjoying that field of study, only to be directed to a completely different academic discipline that gives you the "a-ha moment" of realizing this is what God made you for.
- Your flight to Australia is delayed by 24 hours and you arrive at your destination two hours before a conference, in just enough time to change clothes, wash your face and brush your teeth—and then God provides a full complement of energy and clarity to speak all day.
- You are so traumatized by your parents' emotional and sexual abuse that you splinter into several different internal parts or personalities, but that splintering keeps you from going insane. As those parts integrate after years of therapy, you realize that God's grace enabled some of them to release (forget) memories that you didn't need to know.

God's Grace Through People

- You learn that the person in front of you has paid your toll.
- You don't nag or react with exasperation when someone forgets something you told them, or that they already told you, because you remember you're a fallen, faulty creature

too.

- Giving people a safe place to be real, to express doubts and fears, to confess they messed up, and be met with loving acceptance without shame or condemnation.
- Not writing people off when they make a mistake.
- Lifting off the burden of needless “shoulds” and “oughts” that weigh people down. One grace-filled speaker invited people to respond in song at the end of her message, saying, “If you’d like to sing, great! Join us! If you need a rest, feel free to just listen.” She removed any pressure to perform.

And one of my all-time favorite stories of grace:

- My dear friend had always patterned herself after her mother, who purported to be the ultimate Christian wife and mother. In therapy because of how her life was falling apart, she was starting to realize what monsters her abusive parents were; horrific memories began to surface and the pieces started to fit together. One night she realized that when she got married, she had even chosen the same dishes as her mother’s. Suddenly she couldn’t abide the thought of keeping them in the house a moment longer. She strode into the kitchen on a mission, grabbed a plate out of the cupboard and hurled it to the floor, smashing it to pieces. Her husband heard the noise and came to see what was going on. When she explained the connection between their dishes and her mother, her husband calmly said, “Have at it. Tomorrow morning I’ll take you to get new dishes.” Not only did he clean up the mess when she was done, but all those broken shards damaged their kitchen floor—and he never once mentioned it.

Now that’s grace.

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Leaky Buckets

When I was a little girl, I watched “Captain Kangaroo” on TV. His friend Mr. Green Jeans wore green overalls, to which he would pin little pieces of paper like Post-It Notes (long before they were invented). I remember him pulling off each square and reading it out loud to remind him of something he needed to do. At the time, I thought it was a silly thing for a grown-up to do.



I get it now.

The older I get, the more memory assistance I need. I don't know, really, that it's so much about growing older, but rather about the overwhelming glut of information that cascades over me every day, which leads to a long list of things to do and things to remember that probably wouldn't have existed in previous generations. But it's not just me, and it's not just about remembering to pick up the dry cleaning.

We are like leaky buckets, and we leak stuff. *Important* stuff. We leak the reasons why we should eat healthy foods God made instead of Twinkies and Diet Coke. When our children are

small, we leak the perspective that our job is to lead them to their own personal relationship with their heavenly Father and to prepare them for life as adults. We leak the “lightbulb moments” of supernatural enlightenment and illumination that the Holy Spirit gives us, and they fade into forgetfulness. We leak the conviction that a loving God is in control, so we freak out when things go wrong. We leak the memories of the many little and big things that the Lord does to show us that He loves us, personally and intimately.

God knows that fallen people in a fallen world would leak, and He understands how very weak we are. Leaky, weaky people we are indeed! That’s why He lovingly instructed His people in the Old Testament to keep talking about the things He did for them, to keep teaching their children so they would teach *their* children the things He did for them. That’s why in Joshua 4 He told them to build an altar of remembrance by picking up 12 big rocks from the middle of the Jordan River when they crossed into the Promised Land. Then, when their children asked, “What’s up with these rocks?” they would remember together God’s faithfulness and goodness.

We need to do something physical to help us leaky vessels remember. Some people have planted a tree as their “altar of remembrance.” Others have created monuments; at our previous church, one family had a large well built of rocks, into which was planted a tree with a plaque commemorating the life of a child who had died. It was right in the middle of a gathering area so people would ask, “Why is that there?” and remember the one who had died.

At the very least, recording in a journal helps us remember the things that leak. Two of my most valued possessions are my “God sightings” journal containing stories of when He has shown up in my life as well as the lives of other people, that I didn’t want to forget. And my “wisdom journal,” a collection of sayings and passages from other people that I re-read from time to time to refill my leaky bucket with the good stuff

that had leaked out.

We leak the truth of God's word too, which is why it's so important to keep refilling our bucket from the well daily. I love that Peter says it's good to be reminded of the things we already know but aren't "on the surface": "Therefore, I intend to remind you constantly of these things even though you know them and are well established in the truth that you now have" (2 Pet. 1:12).

Look, we leak—that's a fact of life. It is wise to live in intentional awareness of that unfortunate truth and keep getting our buckets refilled.

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Watching Dr. Phil Through a Discernment Filter

I like Dr. Phil (McGraw), the host of one of TV's top-rated daytime programs, but it's essential to keep a biblical discernment filter in place when watching his show. Last week I winced to see that his producers had talked him into bringing a couple of self-proclaimed psychics onto the program. Dr. Phil calls himself "a skeptic but not a cynic," and he took the bait.

His audience was wildly appreciative of the topic and his guests. In fact, Dr. Phil displayed a stack of emails at least a foot and half high from people anxious to contact "the other side."

Unfortunately, his wife Robin was one of the “believers” most excited to have the psychics on the program. One of the guests, who calls herself “an intuitive,” did a reading for Dr. Phil in their home. She also met one-on-one with Robin, who had high expectations of the reading.

“There were two events that I found to be very profound in his life,” she explained later. “One, I did not know him then, but one I was a part of with his mother. And I even mentioned it to him before the reading. I said, ‘OK, will you really believe and be open if she brings up even one of these two events?’ – and she brought up both events.”

What disappoints me is that although both Dr. Phil and Robin, who has been a speaker for the Women of Faith conferences, confess themselves to be Christ-followers, apparently they are more concerned about what makes for good television than what makes for a disciple of Jesus. And this is why Christians need to filter all media through a discernment grid consisting of what God says.

Check out how God prohibits His people from engaging in any and all occult practices of the surrounding pagan cultures:

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn the abhorrent practices of those nations. There must never be found among you

- *anyone who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire,*
- *anyone who practices divination,*
- *an omen reader,*
- *a soothsayer,*
- *a sorcerer,*
- *one who casts spells,*
- *one who conjures up spirits (Hebrew: “asker of a [dead] spirit”),*
- *a practitioner of the occult (Hebrew: “a knowing one; a familiar spirit”),*

▪ or a necromancer (Hebrew: “seeker of the dead”).

Whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord and because of these detestable things the Lord your God is about to drive them out from before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. Those nations that you are about to dispossess listen to omen readers and diviners, but the Lord your God has not given you permission to do such things. (Deut. 18:9-14)

The psychics on the Dr. Phil show purported to give messages to the living from the dead. They promised they knew nothing of the audience’s private matters, yet came up with some staggering details that resonated with the loved ones left behind. That included Robin.

So what’s going on if it’s not what it appears to be—the dead communicating with the living through a medium?

The reason God prohibits any form of the occult is because it means dabbling with demons, and that is horribly dangerous spiritually. If psychics receive knowledge they can’t possibly know, it’s not coming from the dead. The Bible makes no provision for any communication between the living and the dead (with two exceptions; you can read about that [here](#)). But demons know all kinds of information about people, and they can feed it to their puppets.

For example, when the McGraws discussed private issues before the reading, of course demons were listening to that conversation! Is it really so surprising that the psychic, who explained that she opens herself to the spirits to receive what they want to tell her, received information from evil spirits?

Viewing life through a biblical discernment filter means that sometimes we’ll see things that makes us moan, “N000000000!”

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The Happiest Place on Earth?

January 3, 2012

Disneyland has long positioned itself as “The Happiest Place on Earth.” And Disney goes to great lengths to maintain that illusion. Their parks are as close to spotless as you can get; you never see wrappers, gum or spilled popcorn on the ground, since they get swept up within a minute of



hitting the pavement by an army of “cast members,” from custodians to ride workers, who are devoted to maintaining the fantasy. Every Disney park cast member is trained to be assertively friendly in making things right and keeping people happy. When a friend’s child lost the ice cream scoop from his cone, within moments a Disney person replaced it for free.

Recently I met a couple of Disney reps who were exhibiting at a convention. In talking about the company policy of propagating the illusion of “the happiest place on earth,” they told me that every employee is drilled with the four keys to their success: Safety, Courtesy, Efficiency, and Show. Keep everyone safe, be unfailingly kind and courteous to every guest, “git ‘er done,” and be show-ready and show-perfect at

all times. Both of these ladies' faces lit up as they talked about Disney values and how much they enjoyed their part in keeping the fantasy going.

This resonates with me. When my husband and I visited Disneyland not long after we were married, it was the best day of my life—even better than our wedding day! I never enjoyed myself so much as I did that day, and Disney's unflagging efforts to keep their park the happiest place on earth was the reason why. So I get it.

What I get even more is why it's so successful, and why it's so important.

Disney's desire to provide a great experience and make people happy touches one of our most basic—and universal—heart desires: to return to Eden. We long for perfection. We long to experience no pain and no need. We long to be completely immersed in an ocean of love and affection. We long for what is wrong to be set right. We long for evil to be banished and for good to rule the day.

We long for intimacy with our Creator. And many of us don't even know that's what we're longing for, but I believe that's what's at the heart of all addictions.

All these things we had in Eden, and we lost in Eden. But the story's not over, and God has promised to make everything right. Our longings WILL be fulfilled one day.

In the meantime, we can visit Disneyland or Disneyworld. They will pass away, God's word says, but the real reality of what we're longing for will come to pass (read the end of Revelation). Count on it.

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On the Death of a God-Hater

Dec. 20, 2011

Renowned evangelist for atheism Christopher Hitchens died last week at the end of his battle against cancer. Author of *God Is Not Great*, he knew the end was coming and also knew that many people would speculate about his destiny. As far as we know, he remained persistent in his unbelief and hostility about God, religion, and any concept of the afterlife.

I am one of the many Christians who prayed for him as death approached, knowing full well it would take a miracle for Mr. Hitchens to do a “180” and throw himself on the mercy of a God he has insisted is not there. But then again, no less of a miracle than anyone who was born dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), since dead people don’t choose life apart from a miracle from God.

As I think about his death, there are two things I know for sure.

First, God is just.

He will not force Himself on someone who refuses Him. He will honor our choices, even if those choices lead to eternal separation from Him. When Jesus was face to face with people who stubbornly said “NO!” to Him, He spoke the blunt truth to them: “Since you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life (Jn. 5 :40), you will die in your sins” (Jn. 8:24). Apart from God Himself, there is no life, there is no truth, there is no light (see John 1). So if people persist in their rebellion against Him, there is no way for them to have life, truth, light. . . or peace. A terrible, terrible predicament

for a person that was counting on annihilation and finds himself an eternal soul instead, separated forever from the source of all that makes eternity good, which is God Himself.

Second, God is good. Which also entails Him being full of grace and mercy. Which is why He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). And which also explains why He proclaims, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11).

Even up to the last moment.

If anyone, Christopher Hitchens included, turns to Jesus in faith, even the tiniest amount of faith, like that of a mustard seed, He will save them.

Dr. Russell Moore—teaching pastor, seminary professor, blogger and exceptionally kind man who knows the love of his Father—wrote about Hitchens’ death last week in a post called [“Christopher Hitchens Might Be in Heaven.”](#) He pointed out that no one can know that Hitchens woke up in hell; God’s lovingkindness, expressed through the power of the Gospel, extended salvation up to the man’s last breath.

He writes:

“But I’m not sure Christopher Hitchens is in hell right now. It’s not because I believe there’s a ‘second chance’ after death for salvation (I don’t). It’s not because I don’t believe in hell or in God’s judgment (I do). It’s because of a sermon I heard years ago that haunts me to this day, reminding me of the sometimes surprising persistence of the gospel.

“Fifteen or so years ago, I heard an old Welsh pastor preach on Jesus’ encounter with the thieves on the cross. The preacher paused to speculate about whether the penitent thief might have had any God-fearing friends or family members. If

so, he said, they probably would never have known about the terrorist's final act, his appeal to Jesus, 'Remember me when you come into your kingdom' (Lk. 23:42). They never would have heard Jesus pronounce, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise' (Lk. 23:43).

"These believing family members and friends would have assumed, all their lives, that this robber was in hell, especially dying as he did under the visible judgment of God (Deut. 21:22-23). They would have been shocked to meet this man in the kingdom of God. 'We thought you were in hell,' they might have said, as they danced around him in the heavenly places."

I know that God is just. I know that God is good. I don't know where Christopher Hitchens is right now; none of us do, including his unbelieving brethren insisting he doesn't exist at all, anywhere, in any plane. But as Russell Moore concludes,

"Hell is real and judgment is certain. The gospel comes with a warning that it will one day be too late. But, as long as there is breath, it is not yet too late. Perhaps Christopher Hitchens, like so many before him, persisted in his rebellion to the horror of the very end. But maybe not. Maybe he stopped his polemics and cried out, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

"I don't know. But I do know that the gospel offers forgiveness and mercy right to the edge of death's door. And I know that the kingdom of God is made up of ex-thieves, and ex-murderers, and ex-atheists like us."

Like me. God is good. And He IS great.

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blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/on_the_death_of_a_god-

Don't Wish Me Luck

Dec. 6, 2011

A Christian high school in the Chicago area displayed a disturbing message for one of their teams on their marquee: "Good luck in the State Finals!" I knew they were wishing them well, but unwittingly, the message writer had bought into an unbiblical worldview.

There is no such thing as luck!

The concept of luck is an animistic belief, which is the core of folk religion worldwide: a belief in the unseen world that is populated by various kinds of spirits such as the spirits of the dead (ghosts) and nature spirits, as well as unseen supernatural forces: fate, the "evil eye," magic, witchcraft, impersonal energy forces ("chi") . . . and luck.

People think of good luck as a supernatural force that has to be attracted, or coaxed ("Come on, double sixes!"), or somehow manipulated to work for us. And bad luck is an unseen negative force that we need to protect ourselves from. So people put their trust in sacred or magical objects and actions in hope of manipulating this supposed force of luck.

When I was young, I wore a "miraculous medal" on my watch, a charm that I believed would keep me safe. I see rosaries hanging from rear view mirrors for the same purpose. Then there are magic/sacred items thought to bring luck: a rabbit's foot, a horseshoe, a four-leaf clover. Lots of people scheduled weddings and other events on November 11 of this year (11-11-11) in the belief it would bring them luck. (One

woman on the Dr. Phil show was planning to marry for the eleventh time on 11-11-11 because she thought it would bring her luck after ten bad marriages! Wisely, Dr. Phil told her she didn't need luck, she needed pre-marriage counseling.)

The idea of luck as a force to be wielded, much like "The Force" in Star Wars, plays no part in a biblical view of life and reality. But lots of people believe in it anyway, because the majority of people, including Christians, do not think biblically. They are captive to the false ideas of the surrounding culture, one of which is animism.

[Animism](#) is a degradation of a true understanding of reality, which has been revealed by God in His word: that God has created things we can see, which are temporal, and things we can't see, which are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18). The unseen spiritual dimension contains both good and evil spirits—angels and demons—as well as the souls of people who have died and now exist either in heaven or in hell. They do not wander around looking for rest. The evil spirits—demons—do have limited power, mainly lies, schemes and deceptions. But God's power is always greater.

If you're looking for favor and blessing, don't hope for luck. Look to the God of grace. He is the source of favor and blessing. And His power is the strongest in the universe, which is why trustful dependence on Him is the best way to tap into that power. Not trying to manipulate it—but asking for it in humility and trust.

Which is why I say, don't wish me luck. It doesn't exist.

Ask for God's blessing instead.

This blog post originally appeared at
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