

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?

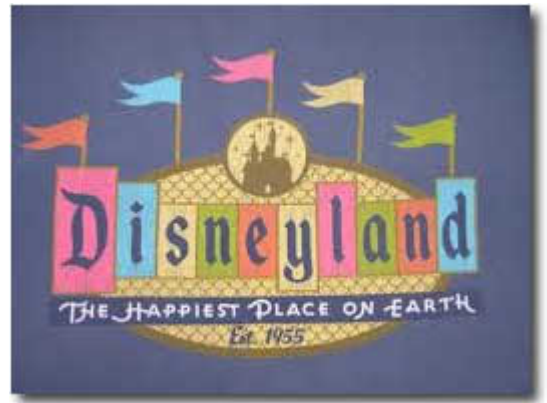
Viewing life through a biblical discernment filter means that sometimes we'll see things that makes us moan, "N000000000!"

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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.

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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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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.

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Knowing the End of the Story

Nov. 8, 2011

The other day, on a friend's recommendation, I started watching *So You Think You Can Dance*, which is like *Dancing With the Stars* only with people who actually can dance. I found it on a cable station, and watched several episodes. Then I discovered that I was watching last season's shows, so I googled the program and found out who won.

Knowing the outcome changes the way I view the competition. A

judge's critical assessment of a performance is just a bump on the road when I know the dancer will eventually win in the end.

That's one of the many reasons for reading and studying the Bible. When we know how the story is going to end, it helps us process the meaning and impact of the slings and arrows of living in a fallen world, and we don't have to be undone by them.

We know that in the end, God will set everything right.

In the end, He will see that good triumphs over evil.

In the end, Jesus will be crowned King over all, and He will reign in His kingdom here on earth, and those who have been faithful will be rewarded with opportunities to reign with Him, to serve in His kingdom. (For a mind-blowing explanation of the difference between the kingdom and heaven, check out Curtis Tucker's new book *Majestic Destiny*.)

It is faithfulness that qualifies us for a place in the kingdom (which is different from receiving eternal life, which is a free gift with no strings attached). And faithfulness is proven by our responses to the challenges and tests of this life. It's about choosing to trust in the goodness and love of a sovereign God instead of resorting to our own methods of making life work. It's about resisting temptation to conform to the world's mold. It's about waiting on the Lord's timing instead of taking matters into our own hands when He doesn't seem to be moving fast enough for us.

Knowing how the Big Story will end helps us put the small stories of our lives into perspective. But knowing how we got here, by studying the histories recorded in the Bible, also provides perspective.

I have a friend who is baffled and confused—well, actually, *terrified* is more accurate—because everything she's ever

counted on to make life work is being taken away. She finds herself divorced, without custody of her children, no job, and no idea how she will pay next month's rent. None of it makes sense to her.

But I've been reading the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah through Malachi) this year, and what's happening to her makes a lot of sense to me. God is lovingly taking away all the props that she has been depending on to make life work so that she can learn that that He is good, that He is her provider, that He is enough. And because she doesn't yet know Him—she really just has some ideas about Him—she doesn't know that she can trust Him.

Just as God cured the idolatry of His people by stripping them of all His gifts and benefits that they blindly attributed to the false gods they worshipped, I believe God is removing everything except Himself from my friend's life. It's a scary place, but it doesn't have to be a hopeless place. God has a way of setting up crazy situations where we are given a front-row seat to what He's about to do to reveal His heart to us.

Studying the Bible's stories and lessons helps us see that. Looking backward, and looking forward.

Where there will be dancing!

This blog post originally appeared at
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When to Break a Promise

Oct. 11, 2011

An important part of integrity is keeping one's word. But are there times when breaking a promise is the *right* thing to do? I think so. And I think God is honored when we do.

We need to make a distinction between giving our word on a legitimate matter—such as wedding vows, signing a legal contract, or even promising to bake six dozen cookies for the PTA bake sale—and making promises that are foolish or sinful in the first place.

I know a number of women struggling to disengage from emotionally dependent relationships with other women. Emotional dependency is putting all your emotional and relational eggs in another's basket, so to speak—needing another's attention, affection and approval as desperately as a baby needs her mama. Making huge promises is part of the manipulative glue that holds these relationships together: "I will always be here for you." "I will always take your calls and return your texts." "I've never loved another like I love you and I always will." "I will never hurt you."

When women come to the point of recognizing these relationships are not God's intention for either of them, they often struggle with their promises as if they were inviolate and carved in stone. Yet the bigger issue—which they need help to see because brokenness keeps us bound up in blindness—is that keeping some promises means sinning against God. In that case, obedience to God is the better choice, even if it means breaking a promise that never should have been made in the first place.

In that case, the right thing to do is repent of making the promise, confess it as sin, and turn in obedient trust to God, depending on Him for help in the painful process.

Recently, a friend who is getting help extricating herself from a sinful relationship told one of her helpers, “But when my friend comes over to help me get out of bed in the morning because I’m depressed, I would be an awful person if she drove all the way over here and I didn’t answer the door and let her in.” The helper wisely responded, “You’re concerned about being an awful person for not answering the door, but you’re in a relationship with a married woman! What about the adultery? Which one is the sin?”

Sometimes, we make promises we shouldn’t make because we didn’t check first with God. Many years ago, our church choir director arranged a day-long seminar with a very wise man. One thing he said stopped me in my tracks: “Why are you here? The need is not the call; the *call* is the call. If God did not call you to this ministry, then you’re not available for what He wants you to be doing.” I realized I had never asked the Lord if He wanted me to sing in the choir, and when I asked, He said no. Embarrassed, I tendered my resignation so that I’d be available for the “something else” that He actually wanted me to do—which, it turns out, was teaching women’s Bible study. Both the women in the study and the other singers in the choir can testify that I am a far better teacher than singer!

Are there promises you should break so you can say “yes” to God instead?

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Young Christians Leaving Church

Oct. 5, 2011

Why are young Christians leaving church? There are lots of reasons, and the latest Barna Report lists six reasons that can be found in the book by David Kinnaman titled, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Church*.

The first reason young people are leaving is due to the feeling that churches are overprotective. This generation has unprecedented access to ideas and worldviews. But they feel that pastors, church leaders, and members of the congregation fear the world and are often ignoring problems in the real world.

Young Christians also feel that Christianity is shallow. A significant percentage say that church is boring and many others say "faith is not relevant to my career or interests."

A third reason for the exodus is that churches often come across as antagonistic to science. Three out of ten young adults with a Christian background feel that "churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in." Many who majored in science say they are struggling to find ways to stay faithful to their Christian beliefs.

A different view of sex is a fourth reason Christian young people want to leave the church. Sadly most young Christians are as sexually active as their non-Christian peers, even though they have more orthodox views about sexuality.

The exclusive nature of Christianity is fifth reason Christian young people leave the church. They have grown up with the tolerance gospel and have trouble reconciling the claims of

Christ and the exclusivity of Christian belief.

Finally, Christian young people also feel that the church is not a friendly place for those who doubt. In fact, they say that most churches do not allow them to express their doubts openly.

The church in the 21st century faces a significant challenge from Christian young people who are trying to reconcile the Bible and Christian teaching with their social experiences. We cannot ignore their concerns, but neither should we affirm their unbiblical views about sexuality or the exclusivity of the gospel. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.

It's Not Rubbing the Genie's Magic Lamp

Oct. 25, 2011

Recently I heard a young man share his story of battling his unwanted same-sex attractions. Though Ben's dad loved him very much, he felt like he was everyone else's dad and *then* his dad. He also didn't connect with the masculine that his dad represented. He ended up with longings for deep connection with males. What helped him turn the corner was when he found people with whom he could be completely honest about his shameful desires and feelings, who also helped him develop his relationship with God.

He shared that he slowly realized his heart was looking for three things in other men. First, he longed for someone who was unquestionably a "Capital M-A-N" who made that intangible connection with him that his father didn't make, leaving him

with a father-shaped hole in his soul. And he realized that he was also looking for a rescuer, to pull him out of his own wretchedness. And finally, he wanted to be comforted by someone, he said, “who’s there when I come back down, when I’m lost, when I’m troubled; I would fantasize about a guy who could just say the right things, do the right things, and comfort me any time I needed it.”

Optimally, he told us, it would really great if he could find someone who would be all three of those things at one time, wrapped up in one person. That would be the “Mr. Right” he longed to find and be loved by.

The major “lightbulb moment” of his journey came when he realized that what he longed for was a Father, a Savior, and a Comforter. . . and that perfectly describes who God is—three in one, Father, Son and Spirit. And because he had trusted in Christ at an early age, that very God was already indwelling him! He realized that the triune God was everything his heart was longing for but he had been too blind to see. God, in giving Himself to His beloved son, was ready to meet Ben’s heart’s needs and longings, but would not force Himself on him. When Ben opened his heart to receive the Fathering, the Saving, and the Comforting of the God who loved him, everything shifted inside.

God connected some dots for *me* when hours later, our pastor observed that Psalm 37:4 is one of the first Bible verses that people memorize. . . and one of the most misunderstood.

Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Sounds like a magic formula, right? Delight yourself in the Lord, and you get what you want? Just a religious-sounding way of rubbing the genie’s magic lamp to get your wishes granted? But that’s not what it means.

When we delight ourselves in the Lord, He gives us Himself,

and *He* is what our hearts desire. Uncover all the surface, temporary things we think we want, and underneath are the true desires of our heart: to be loved, to be known, to be valued, to be safe, to *matter*.

And as Ben showed us, to be fathered, to be rescued, to be comforted.

Yes, we want all those things—and our marvelous God delights to give them to us as He gives us Himself.

He is so good!

This blog post originally appeared at
[blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/its_not_rubbing_the_genies
_magic_lamp](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/its_not_rubbing_the_genies_magic_lamp)