# When Gratitude and Grief Hold Hands

*Sue Bohlin has discovered that the ongoing habit of giving thanks for God's many goodnesses has mitigated her grief in her son's death.*

It's been five months since our son took his life and we were thrown into a sea of grief. I can tell people are still praying for us because God's deep and beautiful grace is holding us up.

The day after Curt died, I was struck with the thought that a gigantic wall of awful grief was going to hit me. Hard. I knew that wall. It slammed into me the first time when our firstborn baby Becky died on her eighth day of life. It slammed into me again almost two years ago when a third of my tongue was cut out because of cancer. So I know how to recognize the unbidden, overwhelming feelings of loss and deep sadness.

But a second and comforting thought chased down the chilling first thought: *The Lord carried me through those times of great grief in the past, and He will carry me again. I don't need to fear the grief monster because my God is bigger than the grief monster. Thank You, Lord, thank You.*

That immediate prayer of thankfulness arose out of a 50-year-long habit that God impressed on me as a college student as I struggled to reconcile why a good God would let polio cripple me. I learned probably the biggest lesson of my life: that He wants us to give thanks not only IN all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18), but FOR all things (Ephesians 5:20). For a deeper dive, I invite you to read my blog post "Giving Thanks for EVERYTHING?"

I couldn't possibly know back in those early days of my walk

with Christ how the habit of giving thanks as a way of life would shape how I could handle the unthinkable loss of a second child decades later.

Giving thanks as a daily habit began as a step of obedience, but then it grew to become an intrinsic part of my everyday life—to the point that I shoot up many more "thank You" prayers than "please" prayers. And that has never been so true as it has been these past five months.

ALL of my "please" prayers for Curt, as he struggled for years with a deep, dark suicidal depression I could not begin to imagine, have been turned into "thank You" prayers. Every day I tell the Lord how grateful I am that my son is experiencing a level of joy he couldn't have imagined any more than I can imagine the pain of his mental illness. I thank Him for the massive sense of relief that is Curt's daily life in heaven. I thank Him that his hearing loss has been replaced with perfect hearing. I thank Him that Curt's love of music, which was devastating because of that hearing loss, has been ratcheted up to enjoy new kinds of beautiful music (so I read in stories of those who have been allowed a glimpse of heaven). I thank Him that my son's deep suffering is only a memory for him now, and he has all eternity to look forward to whatever God will allow him to do. I thank Him that Curt can look forward with clear eyes and unskewed thinking, to the next stages of his new life on the other side.

Every day I thank the Lord that I *know know know* where my son is, and that he is more alive today than he ever was on earth. I thank Him for the beloved family and friends who graduated to heaven before Curt, with whom he is enjoying restored fellowship and laughter and hugs. I thank the Lord for how real heaven is to me.

And because He has taught me how to turn hard truths into a "thank You," I know what to do with the pangs of loss that inevitably strike me every day. When I see Curt's handwriting

on my recipes from the tweaking we did together when cooking, a fresh wave of missing him washes over me . . . and I'm able to say, "Thank You for all the help he gave me in the kitchen over these past 17 years of his living here." When Ray and I wince at needing to find caregivers for our dog Lincoln when we go out of town—something we never needed to do because Curt never went anywhere—I'm able to say, "Thank You that he was our built-in dogsitter for all those years."

When I see his computer components gathering dust in a corner, or when we need computer help, I'm able to chase the pangs of missing him with, "Thank You for the gift of having an IT genius in our home all those years."

It might be easy to scoff and think, "You're just sugar-coating this horrible loss of your beloved son. Get a grip and face your grief squarely instead of trying to paint it with rosy colors."

But I am not a stranger to grief. I've endured a number of very big, very painful losses. I seek to be honest and authentic in this hard place we are in, but my reality is that gratitude softens the blow of grief. The Lord demonstrates His goodness to me in so many ways every day, I can't help but see them because I've grown more sensitive to recognize what I call His "hugs and kisses." Those hugs and kisses are one way He comforts me in this hard time.

Because gratitude and grief CAN hold hands.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/when-gratitude-and-grief-hold-hands/](blogs.bible.org/when-gratitude-and-grief-hold-hands/) on December 17, 2024.

# The Pope Got It Wrong. Breathtakingly Wrong.

*Sue Bohlin reacts to Pope Francis's recent statement that all religions are roads to God, providing a biblical answer to this false teaching.*

Recently (9/13/2024) Pope Francis told a Singapore audience of youth from different faiths that all religions are equal, all different paths to God.

Through an interpreter, he said,

> *"If we start to fight among yourselves and say my religion is more important than yours, my religion is true and yours is not, where would that lead us. It is okay to discuss, because every religion is a way to arrive at God. Analogously speaking, religion is like different languages to arrive at God. But God is God for all. And if God is God for all, we are all sons and daughters of God. 'But my God is more important than your God.' Is that true? There is only one God, and each of us is a language, so to speak, to arrive at God. Muslim, Hindu, they are different paths. Understood?"*[1]

As the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church's 1.3 billion adherents, the pope is responsible for speaking truth to his flock. Not only is this statement heretical, it is a slap in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ—Whom the pope presumably worships and serves. If all religions lead to God, why did Jesus leave heaven to become a human being? Why did He submit Himself to the excruciating suffering of His passion and crucifixion? Why did the sinless, perfect God-man die? What's the point of His resurrection?

No. Different religious paths do not all lead to God. The pope is wrong wrong wrong. Those who believe what he's saying, trusting in their false religions, will remain enemies of God; their sin will forever separate them from God. This breaks my heart. Even as I type this, I pray for God to open the eyes of those embracing this Satanic lie so that they will turn in faith to the one true God.

Those who believe the "all religions lead to God" deception often invoke the story of the six blind Hindus who encountered an elephant. One felt its side and said, "An elephant is a wall." Another felt its leg and said, "An elephant is a tree trunk." A third felt its tusk and said, "An elephant is a spear." The fourth felt its trunk and said, "An elephant is a hose." The fifth felt its tail and said, "An elephant is a rope." The last one felt its ear and said, "An elephant is a fan."

The point of this allegorical story is that each person's encounter and description of the elephant in radically different ways is like the various world religions. None of them should claim to have the corner on truth because they all have different perspectives.

But this view leaves out the larger picture: an elephant is an elephant—not a wall or tree or spear or hose or rope or fan. And the Creator of the elephant has communicated with us the very nature of the "elephant." He has revealed capital-T Truth about reality, and He has been clear in how mankind is to relate rightly to Himself. This blind Hindu story leaves out the very important aspect of revelation, when Someone outside the limitations of our "blindness" as finite creatures, tells us things we cannot know on our own.

Which leads us to the ultimate reason why the Pope is so very wrong. The "Creator of the elephant," Jesus the Son of God, came to earth as a man and made astonishing truth claims about Himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes

to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

***If all religions led to God, why would Jesus say He is the ONLY way?***

He also claimed to be Yahweh, the covenant God of the Old Testament. "Before Abraham was, I AM." (John 8:58).

He claimed for Himself attributes that are only true of God Himself:

**Eternal** "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." (John 17:5)

**Omnipresent** "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Matthew 18:20)

"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

**Sinless** "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?" (John 8:46)

**Accepted worship** "And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!' (Matthew 14:33)

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:27-28)

**Able to Forgive Sins** And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5)

"For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives

sins?" (Luke 7:48-50)

**Judge of All Men** "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice…" (John 5:24-28)

Jesus claimed to be God; He claimed to be the only way to the Father. He backed up these claims by fulfilling prophecy about the promised Messiah. And most phenomenal of all, He said He would die and rise from the dead three days later—and He did it.

We can believe Him when He says He is the only way. We *should* believe Him.

The Pope is massively, terrifyingly wrong. All religions do not lead to God. Jesus is the ONLY way.

1. https://ethosinstitute.sg/every-religion-is-a-way-to-god/ Accessed 9/17/2024 ?

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/the-pope-got-it-wrong-breathtakingly-wrong/ on September 17, 2024.

# What You CAN Say to Someone Who's Grieving

When we lost our (believing) son to suicide last month, we received hundreds of cards and Facebook notes assuring us of people's care and sympathy. What a blessing!

So often, people just don't know what to say in the face of horrific loss and pain, and it's easy to say the wrong thing. One of my favorite-ever blog posts is "What Not to Say When Someone is Grieving."

But I want to share ideas on what has been truly comforting and supportive, because some of the comments we received are how "the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3) blessed us, and I hope you find them helpful for crafting what YOU can say to someone in pain.

Bottom line key: what really comforts and encourages us (because we're still making our way through grief) is communicating LOVE. Nothing encourages like the power of love. If you're really crunched for time, scroll to the end for the two most powerful notes we received.

**Cards**

I am sad and so sorry or all the pain you are experiencing. I'm praying for your peace in the midst of the anguish. With love for you and appreciation for your faithful witness.

May you both feel the hope that anchors our souls—even in dark days and weeks.

I am so sorry for the grave loss you are suffering. I am lifting you up in prayer and asking the Holy Spirit to intercede for you in this time when words are not enough. I ask God to make His nearness evident to you in the coming days

and that His peace would surround and carry you moment by moment. May the Lord bless you and keep you.

There are no words sufficient to convey my deep sympathy for you. Having said that, I know that Curt is now experiencing what those of us who remain can only look forward to—complete fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and all the saints who have gone before. You both remain in my heart and prayers.

Praying for an extra measure of God's presence and peace in the days ahead.

We love you and we feel your pain and wish we could bear some of it for you. We lift you up to our Father's grace!

We know that Curt is fully healed and rejoicing with Jesus over the indescribable gift of glory! Still, we cannot fully fathom the deep emotions you are going through. Just know you are and will be in our prayers.

**Facebook notes**

I will be in prayer asking the Lord to tenderly hold you both in His hands and ease your pain and your grief.

May the Holy Spirit minister to you and meet your needs in ways beyond we could even ask or imagine.

My heart is breaking for you. I'm so sorry. Love you all.

May the Lord be so near, may you cherish your wonderful memories with you son, and may the hope of heaven bring comfort in the deep pain of loss.

No words can adequately comfort—but I am so deeply sorry and I pray for sustaining comfort until the promised reunion.

I am heartbroken for your loss but so grateful for your hope that you will see Curt again.

Oh Sue, words fail. May the peace that passes understanding

come to you, Ray and the family quickly.

Words are inadequate in the midst of such tragedy. Love and prayers for you and your family.

Oh dear friends, we are crushed by this news but we know God’s grace superimposes us in our most difficult moments. We are praying for you in this difficult time and know your future reunion with Curt will erase this present sorrow.

Oh, Sue! I am weeping with you. I am praying for you right now. May the Lord comfort you as only He can. One day, death will be forever defeated and all will be made new. Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

I am asking the Lord to help you feel His presence and strength in tangible ways and that the hope of heaven comforts you. Sending you so much love!

My heart grieves with you, Sue and Ray. May God’s loving presence comfort and sustain you as He did for me four years ago when I received similar news about my son. I’m thankful we grieve but not without hope. My prayers are with you now and in the days to come and I send you my love.

We lost our son to suicide two years ago, so when I tell you my heart aches with you I know whereof I speak. I pray that the Lord sends you comfort. I pray that the Lord holds you in his loving arms. I pray He gives you whatever strength you need. I love you sweet sister in Christ.

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Lord, we ask for Your comfort to envelop our beloved Bohlin family in their time of unimaginable sorrow. Please grant them strength to face each day and the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Surround them with love and support, and let them feel Your presence even in the darkest moments.

Help them to find solace in the memories of their son and to lean on one another as they navigate this painful journey. May they feel Your everlasting arms holding them close, providing hope and healing in the days to come.

In Your merciful name, we pray. Amen.

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I wish I could give you a huge hug right now. My heart aches for you and Ray.

My heart breaks for you both. May you experience God's supernatural peace surpassing all understanding … in such an un–understandable moment.

I have no words. Only tears.

Our hearts are breaking for you! God is faithful, yes but this is HARD.

Oh Sue & Ray, what words are there for this? May you be swamped with God's tender mercy. I pray that the structure you have built upon the firm foundation of Christ, day after day & year after year, now be a sanctuary for you. May many take note to see & know that Jesus is enough for unspeakable times.

Devastated & heartbroken for you all. He was such a sweet soul and he will forever have a piece of my heart. Grateful he is in the arms of Jesus and no longer in agony. Praying the Lord's peace washes over your pain.

Oh Sue. My heart is shattered on your behalf. May you be comforted by ways that only the Lord can offer. I love you SO MUCH. I am approaching His throne for you and your family.

I know God is so near and grieving along with you and Ray! I pray that you can submit all your steps and words to him and let him heal you the only way our amazing God can. I am sending so many hugs.

Oh Sue! I cannot imagine the depth of pain coupled with the hope of heaven. Lord, preserve my dear friends through their deep loss, sustain them with your mighty hand, extend peace and rest as they reflect on sweet memories. Hold them close Lord.

**The Most Powerful Notes:**

h how my heart hurts for you as you bear this great loss. You have been so faithful to love and care for your beloved son all these years. Now you can rest in knowing he is in the arms of Jesus now. May the God of all comfort carry you and sustain you in the difficult days to come, and may He fill you with joyous memories you can cherish in the midst of the grief. You are incredible parents and I'm sure that very few will understand the burden and sacrifice you have carried for so long. Rest now in peace knowing he is with Jesus and your loving work is complete

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My eyes have been glued to this page for 30 minutes, unsure of how to start such a note,

I know words can fail at such a time, but loving prayer does its most urgent work. You both are loved by so many and I know that heaven's gates are flooded with the prayers of the body of Christ. My prayer tonight is that the God of all comfort would comfort your hurting hearts.

Please know that your tears are mingled with family and friends who love you so. I am thankful to be in that number.

With my note comes my love,

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Loving and compassionate words can't *fix* grief, but they most certainly can bring comfort in the hard coldness of the pain of loss. I hope you find this helpful the next time you want

to say something that communicates your heart.

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/what-you-can-say-to-someone-whos-grieving/ on Aug. 24, 2024.

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# Suicide Has Hit Our Family

*Sue Bohlin shares her heart in the wake of her and her husband Ray's son taking his life.*

Last week our beloved 44-year-old son Curt took his life.

He had struggled with severe suicidal depression for 26 years, hating almost every day of his adult life and wanting God to take him home to join his sister Rebecca. His depression and anxiety crippled him to the point of moving back in with my husband and me in 2008. He often shared with us his anguish at life in a fallen world, living in a broken body.

Curt eventually lost most of his hearing as the result of serving on the flight line in the Air Force, but when he was honorably discharged he was told it wasn't bad enough to warrant disability benefits. The loss of his hearing meant losing his touch with music, which he loved. It also meant losing touch with his community in online role-playing games, so he lost his sense of belonging and purpose.

His life was very painful. After staying his hand multiple times over two decades, God allowed him to take his life and instantly enter the heaven he had longed for, for so very long.

Some themes have been rolling around in my head since the news

of his passing.

First, our grief is mitigated by the relief on Curt's behalf that his suffering is over. When I told my husband the news delivered by a police detective, his first words were, "We've known this day might come for 26 years." We have lived with the darkness of his depression and anxiety for a long time, which included the ever-present threat of suicide because he always thought of it as his ticket out.

Second, God's grace is stronger than I have ever experienced in my entire life. It feels like He has tucked me in the shadow of His wing (Psalm 57:1). I have buried a child before; I know the brutality of grief, but God is holding it back. I winced to realize that a hard, heart-wrenching grief awaits me, but then I reminded myself that He will carry me through those days just as He's carrying me now. And I appreciated my friend who gave me "permission to not be okay" when those days come.

Third, the one attribute of God that comforts me more than any other is His sovereignty. A good and loving God is in control. He chose the day of Curt's birth, and He chose the day of his death. We've been clinging to Psalm 139:16, "All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be." Our son did not die a single day earlier than God had planned for him. And He prevented Curt from following through on all the times he planned to take his life since the first time when he was 17. God ordained for our daughter Rebecca to live for eight days, and He ordained for Curt to live for 44 years.

Fourth, God keeps pouring out His goodness on us every time we turn around. We have been inundated with people wanting to help us with everything we need from money for funeral expenses, to food and paper goods, to willing hands to prepare our home for family coming in for his memorial service. And that includes being willing to clean out his room and haul

away all the furniture that reeked of body odor. In case you don't know, severely depressed people usually don't care about personal hygiene, and both our son and his room stank from weeks, sometimes months, of going unwashed. It was a source of sorrow and frustration to us, but we loved him in his mental illness and just lived with it.

Fifth, there is the blessing of *not knowing* so many things. I don't know what he was thinking when something flipped and he went from offering to cook lunch for the family visiting us, to leaving our home intent on stepping off an overpass. I don't know what he was thinking or feeling on that walk. I don't know what his last seconds were like, and I am most grateful that we didn't have to identify him at the medical examiner's office. I don't know so many things, and I am so glad. I can leave all those questions in the Lord's hands, and I can ask him when I see him again-if it matters at all by then.

And that brings me to the most important idea that has marked these days: HOPE. Hope is future-facing faith. Not wishful thinking, like "I hope it doesn't rain on my picnic." Biblical hope is certainty. Hebrews 6:19 calls biblical hope "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." God has used this horrible time to reveal that He has been working in the background to strengthen my future-facing faith. When I say I have hope to be reunited with my son, it's not a wish. I am 1000% certain that he is in heaven and that my husband and I, our other son Kevin, and his wife Lauren will join him there.

I had the privilege of leading Curt to put his trust in Jesus Christ when he was three years old, watching him grow in his faith over the years, watching him bear the spiritual fruit that proved his faith was real. I know he's in heaven, because to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Our dear friend Dave commented on my Facebook post, "I am heartbroken for your loss but so grateful for your hope that you will see Curt again." That's when I had

the lightbulb moment and I replied, “Thanks for using the word HOPE. Future-facing faith. My hope about seeing Curt is as strong as my view of Ray this very minute. Who is sitting three feet from me.”

Curt’s first week in heaven: it felt like he was just on the other side of the invisible wall separating earth from heaven. Maybe it’s the special bond between a mother and the child she bore, maybe it’s something spiritual, I don’t know. But the reality of my son’s new home makes heaven closer to me than it has ever been. My husband Ray has said for years that heaven is more real to me than anyone he knows. Part of it is knowing our baby Rebecca is there, part of it is longing for my new body untouched by polio and cancer.

Curt’s suicide is not okay. Murder is sin, even the murder of oneself. But Jesus’ statement on the cross, “It is finished,” meaning “It is paid in full,” covered every one of his sins, including taking the life God gave him. With God’s begrudging permission, apparently. I trust the Lord with it all.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/suicide-has-hit-our-family on July 16, 2024.

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# Worldview Deficiency

*Kerby Anderson addresses the very sad and dire lack of a biblical worldview in the majority of people claiming to be Christians.*

Over the last few months, I have been doing some interviews on books that document (in one way or another) a lack of moral behavior among evangelicals. If you read articles in *Christianity Today, Ministry Watch*, or *World* magazine, you see

other examples.

As the authors document what is happening in the evangelical world, I always like to bring us back to why. The "why" question is probably more important than the "what" question. Why aren't Christians acting like Christians? Of course, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Christians are supposed to be different than the world, but there is abundant evidence that they are very much like the world around them.

Each year, George Barna posts The American Worldview Inventory. His most recent report shows that very few Americans (including evangelicals) have a biblical worldview. About four percent have a biblical worldview with four percent more with a variety of different worldviews. The dominant worldview (encompassing 92 percent) is the worldview of syncretism.

The classic definition of syncretism is that it is an amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. In the Christian context, it is an acceptance and even affirmation of a diverse set of beliefs that aren't biblical. That is best illustrated by the fact that a majority (58%) of American adults don't believe in absolute truth and instead believe that moral truth is up to the individual to decide.

You would hope pastors might be able to correct some of this theological confusion. But George Barna found that less than a majority (41%) of senior pastors have a biblical worldview. And the problem is worse with youth pastors. Only 12 percent of them have a biblical worldview.

We shouldn't be surprised at what is happening in the evangelical world when we understand the why behind it.

# The Eclipse Declares the Glory of God, v. 2024

*Sue Bohlin is very excited to be the path of the upcoming total solar eclipse, where God shows off once again.*

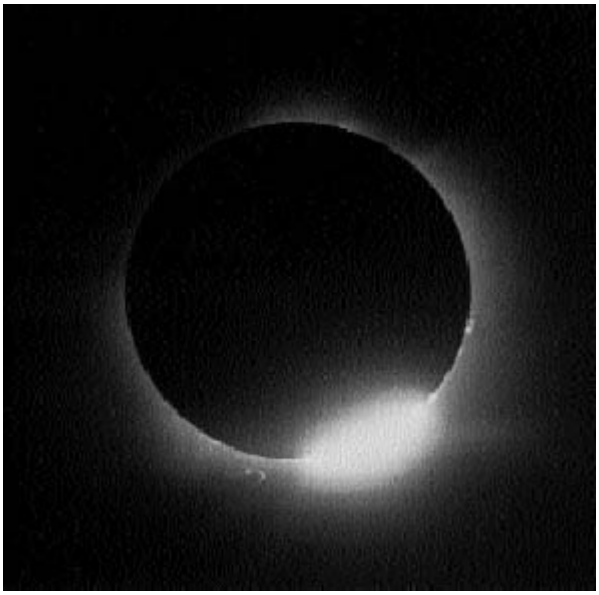
"The heavens declare the glory of God," Psalm 19 tells us. On April 8, 2024, millions of Americans will have an incredible opportunity to see His heavenly glory in a way most of us never have: through a total solar eclipse. On a path running from Texas to South Maine, observers on the ground will see the moon slip in front of the sun, blocking out all its light and dropping the temperature drastically (about 10 to 15 degrees Fahrenheit) and suddenly.

I am thrilled beyond words that by the grace of God, our home in Dallas, Texas is in the path of totality. All I have to do is go out in our back yard to experience this once-in-a-lifetime event! :::doing the happy dance:::

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

Illustra Media's wonderful DVD *The Privileged Planet*, based on the book by the same name by Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards {1}, exposed me to the magnificence of a total solar

eclipse. I will never forget the goosebumps at learning that the sun is 400 times farther away than our moon, but it's also 400 times larger. This means that both of these heavenly bodies appear to be the same size to us on Earth. This phenomenal "coincidence" also makes a total eclipse possible.



During an eclipse, ***the heavens declare the glory of God*** by allowing us to see things about the sun we wouldn't be able to observe any other way, beautiful and gloriously resplendent. Just before totality we can see "Baily's Beads." Only seen during an eclipse, bright "beads" appear at the edge of the moon where the sun is shining through lunar valleys, a feature of the moon's rugged landscape. This is followed by the "diamond ring" effect, where the brightness of the sun radiates as a thin band around the circumference of the moon, and the last moments of the sun's visibility explode like a diamond made of pure light. After the minutes of totality, the diamond ring effect appears again on the opposite side of the moon as the first rays of the sun flare brilliantly. These sky-jewelry phenomena are so outside of mankind's control that witnessing them stirs our spirits (even on YouTube!) with the truth of Romans 1:20–"God's invisible qualities–his eternal power and divine nature–have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."



A total solar eclipse offers so much more, though, than Baily's Beads and the Diamond Ring. At the moment of totality, the pinkish arc of the sun's chromosphere (the part of the sun's atmosphere just above the surface) suddenly "turns on" as if an unseen hand flips a switch. I knew God is very fond of pink because of how He paints glorious sunrises and sunsets in Earth's skies, but those fortunate enough to see a total eclipse can see how He radiates pinkness from the sun itself! ***The heavens declare the glory of God!***

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



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

Astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez noticed details about eclipses

that got him excited:

- During a total solar eclipse, the moon is just large enough to block the large photosphere (the big ball of fiery gas), but not so large that it obscures the colorful chromosphere.
- The moon and the sun are two of the roundest measured bodies in the solar system. (Some moons are potato-shaped!) So when the round disk of the moon passes in front of the equally round disk of the sun, the shapes match perfectly.
- He studied all 65 of the moons in our solar system and discovered that ours are the best planet and best moon for studying the sun during an eclipse. Because the moon fits so perfectly over the sun, its blinding light is shielded, providing astronomers with a view of the sun's atmosphere. We can discern finer details in its chromosphere and corona than from any other planet.
- Being able to study the flash spectrum during a total eclipse enables astro-scientists to determine the chemical makeup of other, distant stars without leaving Earth.

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

Michael Bakich wrote of the 2017 eclipse in *Astronomy* Magazine blog,

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

I think this is true of the 2024 eclipse as well. Whether you are fortunate enough to be in the path of the total eclipse like me, or will only get to see 75% of the sun's surface

covered by the moon (with eclipse glasses, of course!), this extremely important sky event will be proclaiming to everyone that ***the heavens declare the glory of God***. May it make a lasting impression on us all that teaches us more about God's glory!

1. Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2004)
2. http://cs.astronomy.com/asy/b/astronomy/archive/2014/08/05/25-facts-you-should-know-about-the-august-21-2017-total-solar-eclipse.aspx

This post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/the-eclipse-declares-the-glory-of-god-v-2024/ on Feb. 20, 2024.

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# Sticks and Stones . . .

I'm not sure when it began, but the last several years we have seen an explosion of name-calling. Social media is probably the main culprit in giving people freedom to chunk labels and names like snowballs at people they don't even know, with no concern of consequences.

It's no longer a matter of normal human interactions to disagree with someone; now it's about demonizing them. And dragging them through the mud. And judging their character and reputation.

- Refuse to subscribe to progressive ideologies? You are hateful.
- Dare to criticize someone's position? You're a bigot.

- Talk about God’s plan for marriage as only between one man and one woman? You’re homophobic.
- Stand up for common sense in insisting that boys can’t become girls and girls can’t become boys? You’re transphobic.

This kind of name-calling has become personal. The Southern Poverty Law Center, having discovered a cash cow in declaring organizations hate groups, declared Probe Ministries a hate group because we (mainly me) agree with God’s design for sexuality and gender. In agreeing with scripture that homosexual behavior violates God’s command and is thus sin, we are called hateful. For years, I have vetted my articles on LGBT by sharing them with friends who no longer identify as gay or lesbian, to make sure they are not only accurate but also kind and compassionate.

But when our neighbor learned that Probe was on the SPLC’s hate group list, he told my husband that I was hateful.

“Sue? Hateful? C’mon, you’ve known her for years. Do you honestly think she’s hateful?”

I’m grateful that he gave it some thought, and the next week he retracted his assessment. That was nice; his name-calling wasn’t hurtful to me. Kinda crazy, but not hurtful-because I knew it wasn’t true. He was just being consistent to his leftist beliefs.

In addition to being called hateful, I’ve received a number of ugly emails declaring me ignorant, foolish, biased, an idiot, and some disgusting sexual slurs as well. In each case, the writers felt free to unleash their hostility and judgmentalism on me, a total stranger.

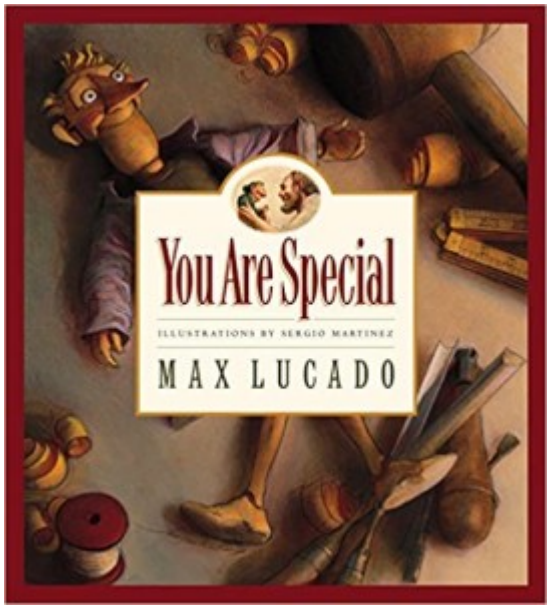
We’ve all heard the old rhyme, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me,” right? Of course, it’s a lie. Name-calling DOES hurt, especially from people close to us, who should be protecting our hearts rather than trying to

inflict pain.

But it doesn't necessarily have to.

I was thinking about why these names slide off me the way hair slides off a plastic cape during a haircut.

The best explanation, I think, is found in my favorite children's book, Max Lucado's *You Are Special*.




It's about a group of wooden people called the Wemmicks who all day, every day, go around giving each other gold star stickers or gray dot stickers. Punchinello, who can't seem to get anything right, only gets gray dot stickers.

But one day he meets a girl who doesn't have any gold star OR gray dots. It's not that people don't try to give her stickers-they just don't stick.

Punchinello asks her why, and she says, "It's easy. Every day I go to see Eli the woodcarver. I go and sit in the workshop with him."

Punchinello goes to see Eli.

> *"Hmm," the maker spoke thoughtfully as he inspected the gray circles. "Looks like you've been given some bad marks."*
>
> *"I didn't mean to, Eli. I really tried hard."*
> *"Oh, you don't have to defend yourself to me, child. I don't*

*care what the other Wemmicks think."*

*"You don't?"*

*"No, and you shouldn't either. Who are they to give stars or dots? They're Wemmicks just like you. What they think doesn't matter, Punchinello. All that matters is what I think. And I think you are pretty special."*

*Punchinello laughed. "Me, special? Why? I can't walk fast. I can't jump. My paint is peeling. Why do I matter to you?"*

*Eli looked at Punchinello, put his hands on those small wooden shoulders, and spoke very slowly. "Because you're mine. That's why you matter to me."*

Eli explains to Punchinello why the stickers don't stick on his friend:

*"Because she has decided that what I think is more important than what they think. The stickers only stick if you let them. . . The stickers only stick if they matter to you. The more you trust my love, the less you care about the stickers."*

As Punchinello walks out the door, Eli reminds him, "You're special because I made you. And I don't make mistakes."

Punchinello thinks, "I think he really means it."

And then a dot fell to the ground.

For 50 years I have been spending daily time with my Maker, listening to what He says is true about me: I am His beloved child in whom He is well pleased. I am His redeemed daughter, a princess warrior, His workmanship, gifted with supernatural enablings to fulfill the works He gave me to do. My heavenly

Father loves me the same way He loves His Son; His Son loves me so much He died for me and rose from the dead to make me His bride.

Being loved and cherished like that, no wonder the stickers of labels and names slide right off me.

If you struggle with what other people think of you, immerse yourself in what your Maker says is true about you. My favorite list, "I Am a Child of the King" by Dr. Ed Laymance, can be found here.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/sticks-and-stones/ on July 23, 2023.

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# Be WHAT?

*Be not afraid, be strong, be not discouraged, be anxious for nothing, be transformed. How are we supposed to obey God's seemingly impossible commands?*

During a recent sermon, our pastor was teaching through Jesus' healing of a leper, who threw himself on Jesus' mercy and implored Him:

"Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him. (Luke 5:13)

I was struck by Jesus' command, "Be cleansed."

Huh?

How does a leper, afflicted by an incurable disease that isolated him so terribly, just . . . “be cleansed”?

How does one obey a command like that?

Further, how does one obey similar seemingly impossible commands, such as:

- Be not afraid.
- Be strong.
- Be not discouraged.
- Be anxious for nothing.
- Be transformed.

It makes me smile to think about the one answer that all these “Be _____” commands have in common:

We can’t do it. Jesus wasn’t kidding when he said in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in Me and I abide in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing.”

What we CAN do, *all* we can do, is to open ourselves up to the grace and power of God, giving Him access to ourselves, and inviting Him to do the work, to make the changes.

How was the leper cleansed? Jesus took his leprosy into Himself, I think, exchanging His health and “leprosy-freeness” for the man’s horrible sickness. Jesus’ holiness and perfection destroyed the leprosy the way bleach destroys mold and mildew. The point is, Jesus did it.

**”Be Not Afraid”**

I understand there are 365 commands to “be not afraid” in the Bible, one for each day of the year. When we are beset by fear, how can we stop being afraid? How do we just turn it off?

We can’t. But Jesus can.

Just as He reassured Joshua in entering the Promised Land that He was with him and would never leave him or forsake him (Joshus 1:5), Jesus promised us before leaving earth to go back to heaven, “I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

The last two medical procedures I had done, I was scared. I was so scared I was literally shaking. I couldn’t turn off the fear, but I could (and did) remind myself that Jesus was with me, He had me, He was in charge and taking care of me. That’s what I focused on, and that’s what shrank the fear.

I get that; as a mother, when my young kids were scared, I would reassure them with, “I’m here, I’m here, Mommy’s here with you.”

**“Be Strong”**

As a polio survivor whose entire left leg was originally paralyzed and has been very weak my whole life, I can truly appreciate the apparent craziness of this command. It’s like my brain telling my frail and lame leg, “Hey! Be strong!” Ain’t gonna happen! So why would God give us this command?

We see the full story in Ephesians 6:10, which literally says, “[B]e being strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of His power.” The verb is present passive imperative, which means we are told to move out of the driver’s seat and let the Lord drive. Let Him be strong in us; let Him pour the power of His might into and through us.

It’s like allowing ourselves to be hooked up to a “Jesus IV” so that His power and strength flows into our veins.

It’s like buckling ourselves into an airplane seat, sitting back, listening to the mighty jet engines roar to life, and allowing the pilot to hurtle us down the runway, gaining speed, until the plane takes off and we are soaring through the skies. Somebody else does all the work.

The way to “be strong” is actually to be strengthened by a power and force not our own, by receiving and trusting in God’s strength and not trying to be strong in our own strength.

**“Be Not Discouraged”**

This command is often paired with the command to not be afraid, which makes sense. In the Old Testament, God linked His command to “be not discouraged” with the powerful promise of His presence and power for His people. Since God is not only powerful but also sovereign—He has everything under control and will work everything together for our good if we love Him and are called according to His purpose, Romans 8:28—we can jettison discouragement and be encouraged.

I love this passage in 2 Chronicles 32:7—

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him.” I’m pretty sure the apostle John had this in mind when he wrote in the New Testament, “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world (meaning Satan).”

And how encouraged was the prophet Elisha’s servant who “had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?”

So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” And the LORD opened the servant’s eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:15-17)

We can choose to be encouraged over discouragement if we

remember that there is a spiritual reality in the heavenly realms that our physical eyes can't see, another reason to trust God.

**"Be Anxious for Nothing"**

The twin terrorists of anxiety and depression have a chokehold on many people today, especially in the wake of the pandemic. Yet we are told in Philippians 4:6 to "be anxious for nothing." I'm so glad there is a comma and not a period after the word *nothing*, because the antidote for anxiety is right there in the text: "but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

I think Paul had meditated on his friends' notes of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus challenged His audience's worry about the basics of life in Matthew 7:25-34. His perspective was to trust His Father, who cared far more for people made in His image than lesser parts of His creation that He also cared for.

The antidote for anxiety is to tell God what we're concerned about, but not to stop there: also focus on and deepen our understanding of just how loving, kind and generous the Father is toward us.

Wise people have defined anxiety as "fear of loss." When we focus on and trust in God instead of the things we are afraid of losing, the anxiety will shrink.

**"Be Transformed"**

Romans 12:2 says to "be transformed by the renewing of our minds." We can't transform ourselves, we need to give God permission to change us from the inside out. It really starts with recognizing the need to BE transformed in the first

place, with the humility that begins to see how much we fall short of Jesus' command to "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Oh look, there's another "Be _____" command! Be perfect! Yikes! How can we do that?

By being transformed.

How do we do *that*?

By asking for it. By inviting the Holy Spirit to make us like Jesus and His Father. By responding with repentance when He convicts us of sin and righteousness, which is His job (John 16:8). By "taking off" the old thinking habits and behaviors that are displeasing to God, and "putting on" the new habits and behaviors that align with the heart and character of God—which we learn about as we get to know Him in His word. And we take off and put on with the Spirit's empowering, not our own efforts.

There's an important thread to obeying all these "Be _____" commands: God does the work in us, with our cooperation, as we surrender and submit to Him.

Philippians 2:13 tells us that God is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. He gives us "the want-to and the can-do." He's the one who enables us to live out His commands to "Be _____."

The Christian life is a supernatural life! God does the work, we get the blessings!

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/be-what/](blogs.bible.org/be-what/) on June 21, 2023.

# Is Comparison Always Bad?

*Sue Bohlin contrasts some downsides and upsides of comparing ourselves to others.*

“Comparison is the thief of joy.”

I’ve been hearing that for decades.

But is it, always?

Examples of how true that is, most certainly abound.

I recently read my friend Amy’s Facebook account of her college experience. A gifted singer, she was a jazz vocalist major at a university known for its excellent music program. The only problem was that she had a friend and classmate who was so much better than Amy. She used to go home on weekends and bemoan the difference to her parents, asking why *they* couldn’t be jazz musicians like her friend’s parents. She eventually changed her major to pre-med, which was easier in comparison.

“A few years later,” she writes, “I was watching the Grammys. I went on to watch my friend Norah win 11 out of 11 Grammys she was nominated for!!! At that moment she did something bigger than most people ever even do in the industry.

Yes. I had compared myself to Norah Jones . . .”

Yeah, it’s not such a great idea to compare yourself to a legend.

Comparing oneself to others can easily result in landing in one of two bad places, particularly through social media.

You can look down your nose at people you think you’re better

than, puffing yourself up with pride and arrogance. You can judge others for how they look, where they (or their children) go to school, what kind of car they drive, the home they live in. It's easy to slide into contempt for people who don't measure up to your standards.

It's not just personal assets though. On Facebook and Cruise Critic, I read people dissing Carnival Cruise line as "the Wal-Mart of cruising." This affordable vacation provides customers with 24/7 electricity and clean water, unlimited food and drink, a clean room and a comfortable bed with their own bathroom, daily room cleaning, more entertainment and recreation options than they can possibly take advantage of—all available in the middle of the ocean. Millions if not billions of people on earth can only dream of this level of luxury.

Or, more likely, you can compare your reality to everyone else's curated, carefully chosen and often edited pictures of the images they want the world to see. Particularly for teenagers and young adults, this is resulting in a higher degree of depression and anxiety than the world has ever seen.

The invention of filters for social media apps such as Instagram and Snapchat makes it possible for people to compare their reality to the impossibility of unattainable perfection—of their own face! Growing numbers of people are requesting plastic surgeons to make them look like they do on their filter-adjusted images. Of course, no one can make a human being perfect.

So this leads to a morass of self-pity. It feels like people can almost taste a level of perfection they long for but it is denied them. How cruel! They wouldn't even know this kind of sadness and discontent if it weren't for technologically-driven comparison.

In a completely different vein, we are also seeing the

incredibly sad results of boys comparing themselves to girls and wishing they had a girl's body and a girl's life—and girls convinced their lives would be better and they would be happier and safer in a boy's body.

This kind of comparison is bad enough on its own, but with the rampant gender ideology and medicalization of gender-confused people, it is now easier than ever before to feed the fantasy and delusion that the other sex would be better through easy access to cross-gender hormones and body-mutilating surgeries.

This is heartbreaking.

And it is yet another example of how comparison can be the thief of joy, because trying to secure what God has not granted us leads to all kinds of disappointment.

So . . . is comparison *always* bad?

No!

It can be a source of perspective that feeds our awareness of how blessed we are.

As I continue to recover from the trauma of tongue cancer surgery, I have discovered a worldwide Facebook support group for tongue cancer survivors. This is how I have learned how easy I have it. My cancer was cut out of my tongue, but I didn't need a "tongue flap," a graft harvested from my arm or leg. I didn't need a feeding tube, and I can still swallow, and eat, and taste, and talk. There was no cancer in my lymph nodes, so I didn't need chemotherapy or radiation. As I have read of other people's horrendously difficult journeys through tongue cancer, I am deeply moved with gratitude for my relatively easy path.

I see people living in homelessness, and I give thanks for the blessing of a home to live in.

I look at my canes, which I need as my polio-ravaged body

continues to weaken, and I give thanks for the privilege of walking. I didn't need my canes for the year and a half I wasn't able to walk because of horrible arthritis in my hips. When walking was restored to me after hip replacement surgeries, my wonky polio gait changed from one kind of limp to another, but limping meant *I was walking again!* Thank You Lord!

I think the ultimate value in the redemptive kind of comparison, though, is found in comparing ourselves not to other people, but to Jesus.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us to "fix our eyes on Jesus." If we compare ourselves to Him, we will see ourselves as appropriately small, weak, lesser than, and desperately needy of Him. If we fix our eyes on Him, we won't be distracted by comparing ourselves to others and end up feeling either puffed up or put down. If we compare ourselves to Him, we will experience true humility, which is seeing ourselves as neither too big nor too small, but right-sized.

So comparison can be bad and ugly, but it can also be a source of great blessing. May we be wise in what we do with it.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/is-comparison-always-bad/ on May 16, 2023.

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# Trusting God on the Other Side of Bizarre

In my last blog post, Trusting God in the Bizarre," I shared how a diagnosis of tongue cancer had blown up my world and how I was wrestling with my fear—again—of pain and suffering.

It has now been 11 weeks since a surgeon removed a third of my tongue. I am still healing, both my tongue and my neck, from which he removed 20 lymph nodes—which were cancer free. I still thank the Lord for that graciousness. My speech is no longer impaired although it *is* affected. I sound like I have a cough drop in my mouth when I talk, and the "s" sound is still a challenge.

Let me share with you what "Trusting God in the Bizarre" looks like on the other side of surgery.

I continue to believe that this cancer is a form of spiritual warfare, and it was a very personal attack as retaliation for continually speaking out about the goodness of God's design for sex, gender, and sexuality. According to Ephesians 6:13, the outcome of successful spiritual warfare is to *just stay standing.* ("[W]hen the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.") I dug in my heels, so to speak, and determined to keep standing in the goodness of God, not allowing the enemy to knock me down. And to keep standing in my trust of His sovereignty, that a good and loving God is in control. As I praised Him for using pain as a sculpting tool to shape me like Jesus, my heart of thanksgiving repelled the enemy, for the Lord abides in the praise of His people (Psalm 22:3). I love the image of the God of light dwelling in the heart of the believer, because darkness cannot stand before light. It has to flee. And so did the enemy, as I thanked and praised God for His lovingkindness to me.

Before the surgery, I was pretty much terrified of the physically torturing pain that never came—a source of wonder and deep thanksgiving. What I was *not* prepared for was the emotional pain of soul-wrenching loss. The grief of losing my life before the surgery; the grief of losing a body part; the grief of losing my clear speech, which I had always taken for granted. In the first couple of weeks, my husband Ray told people at church, "She almost never smiles anymore," and when

I did, it was lopsided, still affected by the surgery, the numbness, the cut nerves.

I journaled, *I am depressed and sad and grieving and unhappy and feeling crummy. My life is not lost, it's put on hold. . . . STUPID HARD. That's my phrase for this. And the shock of it shows I'm blessed by how beautiful my life has been up to this point.*

For two of those early post-op days I was deep in the weeds of grief, exhausted from frequent tears that came unbidden. Instead of a tissue box, I kept a stack of napkins next to my recliner and it was amazing how many I went through. Then the third day, I received such moving encouragement via texts from my son in California that tears of gratitude and appreciation flowed. I actually started to feel dehydrated from the crying. When the fourth day proved to be tear-free, I was amazed by how much energy I had! What a poignant reminder of how exhausting tears are, and why people overtaken by tears need to be given extra-large doses of grace and compassion.

Before my surgery, I asked God to give me a handle to hang onto when I woke up and then afterwards, and He gave me this: "Be a window." I journaled, *A window doesn't work at being transparent and clear, just as a branch doesn't work at receiving the life of the vine. I just need to ABIDE. I will have the IV right there as a visual reminder to be "actively passive" in receiving the Lord's life and letting Him shine through me.*

Wincing internally because of my speech, I kept using the phrase, "I'm not ready for prime time," but the Lord showed me that oh yes it is. I noticed that when people knew about my tongue cancer surgery, they were able to understand me easily, not like strangers who didn't know and would ask me to repeat myself. He impressed on me that I am in a window of time, ever-closing as I slowly heal, where people are listening more closely to me than ever before. I don't know if God is

anointing me, or if He's anointing the ears of people I'm talking to, but something special is happening.

When I realized that rather than putting my life on pause, waiting for "prime time," I am in a limited-time window of blessing, I prayed, "Please don't let me miss any opportunity You are opening for whatever You want to do through me?" Various doors opened to speak or teach—at church, at a women's luncheon, in a couple of classes at a Christian high school—and when I am able to share about recovering from tongue cancer surgery, *people listen extra hard.*

So the first direction I got from God was, "Be a window." Now that's been expanded to, "Be a window IN this window."

Before the pathology report for my lymph nodes came back clear, I wrote:

*I have been begging God for no cancer in the lymph nodes, but what if He says no? What if my path goes into the radiology unit?*

*God is good even when there is cancer. He loves me even if He has given a green light to more cancer. If He says yes to lymph nodes then He has a plan for me to bring glory to Himself through me, through my response. He will show others what the response of faithfulness and trust looks like, as I seek to "be a window." Lord, give me direction and wisdom in how to show YOU off without showing ME off. You know—oh, how You know!!—how I struggle with pride. I want to be the best example of a faithful suffering Christian—but I don't want to suffer to do it! Thank You for using this trial to make me more like Jesus. Thank You that I will look back on this "light and momentary affliction" (2 Corinthians 4:17) and think, "TOTALLY WORTH IT!!" Thank You that this is how I glory in my suffering (Romans 5:3)—by focusing on You and on what is true, and not the pain. Just as Peter needed to focus on You and not the storm when he walked on water.*

I recorded several videos for social media to give updates on how I was healing and how I was sounding. In this one, I was transparent about the fact that sometimes I have a hard time with the “s” sound. But it struck me that there is more value in people seeing the Spirit-enabled grace of self-acceptance in the face of loss, than if my speech were unaffected in the first place.

https://www.facebook.com/559034244/videos/1924001134618178/

Several people have asked, “What do you think God wanted you to learn from this trial?”

I honestly don’t think it’s about gaining more information about God or learning more life lessons. I think it’s about building my character and perseverance. I think it’s about growing my roots deeper in my dependence on Christ and maturing me spiritually, to make me more like Him. That’s the spiritual fruit that the Lord wants to see His people bear, I think.

I’ll keep you posted. *still a little lop-sided smile*

This blog post originally appeared at https://blogs.bible.org/trusting-god-on-the-other-side-of-bizarre/ on March 22, 2023.