Instead of New Year's Resolutions

Fill in the blank: New Year's _____.

You probably either supplied "Eve" or "Resolutions," right?

Resolutions are intentions that may last days or weeks, but so often they peter out before we even get used to using the new year in our dates. May I suggest that instead of forming resolutions, we spend time asking some powerfully insightful questions that will help us evaluate ourselves truthfully and helpfully?

Here are three questions that many community/accountability groups ask each other regularly (as in, weekly):

What am I doing to feed myself (spiritually)? *How am I spending time in God's word and other sources of spiritual truth and wisdom such as books?*

What am I doing to feed my flesh? *How am I indulging my appetites and desires in ways that glorify myself instead of God?*

What am I doing to feed others? *How am I pointing others to Christ and helping them grow spiritually?*

My pastor at Watermark Community Church-Plano, Kyle Kaigler, is especially good at pointed questions. Every morning, as he thinks back on the previous day, he examines himself in four areas:

Where was I hooked? (caught in a bad habit that controls me)

Where was I cold? (being so self-focused that I failed to be loving and kind to those around me)

Where was I scared? (allowing my fear of man to keep me from saying and doing the things I should be)

Where was I proud? (taking credit for what God did)

(Pastor Tim Keller asks these same questions: https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/help-with-prayer-simple-clear-gospel-devotion-from-tim-keller/)

Kyle also offers these questions:

John Piper says that "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." So, looking back over the last 12 months:

What are the most God-glorifying occasions over this past year that came from finding satisfaction in Him? *When was I moved to erupt in gratitude and praise for what God did in my life? Were there sweet moments of deep connection with others, or a "lightbulb moment" when He revealed truth to me in a way that zapped lies and wrong beliefs? Were there moments of realizing I was just* immersed *in His goodness?*

What was a distraction to the glory of God? *In what areas of my life is my stubborn affinity for my flesh, getting my way, insisting on staying in my comfort zone, serving like mud that covers up "Christ in me, the hope of glory"? Where did my entrenched habits (such as continually checking my phone) function like a stop sign, keeping God at a distance? How have I tuned Him out so that I miss the ways He wants to nudge me, direct me, lead me through the day?*

Here are some helpful spiritual assessment questions:

What has God been teaching me in His word? We should be recording the things the Holy Spirit is showing us in our time in His word so we can remind ourselves of His lessons and insights. Otherwise we are the guy from James 1 who looks in a mirror and then turns away, thoughtlessly unaware of what he

looks like.

How's my time with the Lord?

a. Consistent and meaningful (It's ok to choose this option)
b. Consistent but not so meaningful (I am faithful to go before the Lord but I leave the time unfulfilled)
c. Inconsistent but meaningful (I don't do it very often but when I do, He is faithful to meet me there)
d. Inconsistent and not meaningful (it's just not happening)

(If a or c) **How is God transforming my life?** What is God revealing about Himself and His desire for my life? How is my heart being changed to more faithfully follow where He is leading? What have I surrendered (or still working on surrendering) to Jesus' control? How is my life changing so He is increasing, and I am decreasing?

(If b or d) **What are the barriers to consistent and meaningful time with God?** (Busyness, worldliness, selfishness, sin—lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, sinful pride of life)

Am I sharing my story of how Jesus Christ changed my life?

Am I being a good steward of the body God gave me?

Am I being a good steward of the resources He has given me?

And finally, again thanks to Kyle, here are some interesting survey questions for family members:

Spouse survey

1. What were the best memories that we made together this year as a *couple*?
2. What were the best memories that we made together this year as a *family*?
3. What would you consider the key challenges we faced as a family this past year? What about in our marriage?
4. If someone were to ask you, "Describe your current

marriage relationship." What would you say and why?
5. If you could change anything about last year, what would it be and why?
6. Based on the experiences that we have had as a couple and as a family, what have you learned about God and His work in
our lives?
7. What are 3 trips or activities that you would enjoy doing together this next year?
8. What do I do that really ministers to you and you would love it if I did it more?
9. What are your top fears/concerns for each of our children?

Kid Survey

1. What have been some of the best times you have had with me this past year?
2. If you had to give me some advice on being a better parent, what would it be and why?
3. What are some things that you would like to talk with me about and why?
4. What are some of your fears that you would like me to pray for you about?
5. What is something that you would like to do with me?
6. How can I help you grow as a Christian?
7. As you consider conversations and time together as a family over the past year, what new things have you learned or understood more about God?

I think these powerful questions, answered thoughtfully and truthfully, will serve us better than any New Years Resolution we've ever made.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/instead-of-new-years-resolutions/ on December

31, 2019.

Why I Won’t Apologize For Watching Hallmark Christmas Movies

I’ve decided to take the “guilty” out of “guilty pleasure” when it comes to watching Hallmark Christmas movies.

This cultural icon has become fodder for endless jokes and even sermon illustrations. Yes, they are completely formulaic and the always-happy endings are entirely predictable. What keeps us watching are the “getting there” details of maneuvering the journey through falling in love and overcoming obstacles and the inevitable misunderstandings that are shortly and inevitably resolved. (“Whew! That was a close one!” said no one ever.)

But there is such a deeply satisfying resolution in every movie that makes the obligatory happy ending seem not obligatory at all. Just . . . *right*.

I found myself thinking about the sweet satisfaction of every movie that makes my spirit hum with joy, looking for the “something deeper” that I sensed was waiting to be discovered.

Then I remembered the Really Big Picture about the true nature of reality that God has presented to us in His word. The story of God rescuing man winds its way from Genesis to Revelation with lots of plot twists along the way, but there is an unimaginably Ultimate Happy Ending in the final book. The true story of the battle of good and evil ends with justice and

rightness. Evil is finally contained and punished in the Lake of Fire, and True Love—God's love for His beloved people—Wins.

There's even a wedding! The Lamb of God, Jesus, takes His bride, the Church, as His wife.

The reason Hallmark Christmas movies are so satisfying is that they resonate with the Big Story where there is such a happy ending we can't even begin to imagine it.

Here's the ending, from Revelation 21:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

The real Happy Ending means no more death or mourning or crying or pain. One final wiping away of our tears, and then an eternity in new bodies where tear ducts will only be useful for tears of overwhelming joy.

It's always a secular Christmas in Hallmark movies, where Jesus is never mentioned. It's always about "the Christmas spirit" and "Christmas magic." But the happy endings are still legitimate because, like all good stories, they point to ultimate reality where Jesus is King and He will make all things right.

And now, if you'll excuse me, there are more movies to watch.

This post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/why-i-wont-apologize-for-watching-hallmark-christmas-movies/ on December 17, 2019

What Does Trusting God Look Like?

When friends are frozen by fear and anxiety, I often suggest they recite Psalm 56:3 over and over: "When I am afraid, I will trust in You."

But what does it mean to trust God? What does it look like in real life? How do we understand *how* to trust Him?

I recently asked this question on Facebook and was deeply blessed by the wisdom and experience of friends who have learned how to trust God in the refining fires of life in a fallen world.

One scripture reference was cited again and again, probably the best go-to verse on trusting God, Proverbs 3:5-6:

> Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
> And do not lean on your own understanding.
> In all your ways acknowledge Him,
> And He will direct your paths.

Verse 3 is a parallelism, a Hebrew form of idea rhyming, where two ideas are complementary sides of the same coin, so to speak. *Trusting in the Lord with all your heart* means *not*

leaning on our own understanding. If we're not leaning on our own understanding, that means leaning on God's understanding—and His character, and His goodness, and His love. *Acknowledging Him in all our ways* means continually orienting ourselves toward Him the way a plant turns to the light. And choosing, DELIBERATELY choosing, to refuse to lean on our own understanding, leaning hard into Him instead.

So trust is a kind of leaning, transferring our weight onto someone or something else.

I get leaning.

30 years ago I started using a cane because my weak polio leg was only going to get weaker. It was amazing how much more instant stability I had. Which is what happens when we lean on God.

So trusting means CHOOSING.

We make one initial choice to lean into God instead of ourselves, especially when life doesn't make sense, and then we continue to practice making that choice over and over.

I think there are three aspects of trusting God: Making the initial choice to trust Him, reminding ourselves of what is true, and continuing to choose to trust.

Choosing to Trust

Trust starts with a definitive, intentional decision to "step over the line" by turning from doing things our way, trusting in ourselves and our own understanding, to transfer our dependence to God. Here's a word of wisdom concerning not relying on ourselves and our own understanding [read: manipulating]: "Trust is living without scheming."

One wise friend shared, "Trust is the expectation of good based on the character of God. I remind myself in the middle of the muddle: 'This story is not over yet.'"

Have you ever seen scared little children pressing hard into their parents? It's what they do to their mommies and daddies because it's the nature of emotionally healthy children to trust their parents, especially when they're scared.

Pressing hard is a picture of trust.

Trusting happens when we realize, "I am not in control. I release my illusion of control and give the reins over to the Lord."

One friend wrote, "There's usually a point where you have to admit you no longer have the reins. For me, I can recall specific instances where I have said, 'Lord, whatever will bring You the most glory . . . [do it.]' It's like something in the spiritual realm is released when we allow God to be God in our lives."

I love that she used the word "released." That is such a powerful concept. I'm taken to Matthew 11:28-30—"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Releasing the weariness and burden of trying to run our own lives in our own strength onto Jesus is how we enter His rest, which we only get on the other side of trusting.

Along the same lines, trusting God looks like relinquishing worries and anxieties, rolling them over into Jesus' more-than-capable hands, and then choosing to leave them there. ("No, I'm not going to worry about that, I gave it to Jesus on Tuesday at 3:14 p.m.")

One of my fellow Bible study leaders shared this gem:

"I learned to swing dance about a year before becoming a believer and one of the ways my partner and I would practice was for me to be blindfolded. I had a tendency to anticipate

the moves that he would lead as opposed to letting him lead me and I was unintentionally hijacking his lead—very often. The blind fold made me wait, listen, and not anticipate. He was able to lead me through combinations I would have never been able to imagine (he was a much more experienced dancer than me). In my early walk, as I disciplined myself to walk with the Lord, I would reflect on my experience with dancing blindfolded and it gave me great courage to trust Him through things unseen."

So trusting means choosing with the heart and mind, "I will follow YOU, Lord!"

One more picture of what trusting God looks like. Several friends responding to my Facebook post invoked the idea of *clinging* to Him, "even when it's scary and life doesn't appear to make sense. Knowing that, even in the hard times, He is working to perfect us, to grow us, to give us hope, and to bring glory, through us, to Himself. It means the assurance that He has the big picture of His plan in sight and everything He allows/ordains for me is a piece of that."

Maybe nobody understands the concept of "clinging" like the tourist who discovered his harness wasn't attached to the frame of his hang glider. He literally had to hang on to the frame for dear life for his harrowing two-minute flight.



What a picture of trust as clinging!

Trust is a lovely "holy stubbornness" in clinging to God's goodness and sovereignty no matter how we feel, just as the hang glider stubbornly clung to the frame of his glider.

Reminding Ourselves of What is True

Once we've made the choice to trust God, we need to keep on trusting. The way we build our trust is to remind ourselves, over and over and over, of trustworthy truths about God:

- God is good.
- He will never leave us.
- He loves us.
- He is in control.
- He never makes mistakes.
- He can be trusted.

The continual process of trusting God is not only speaking the truth to ourselves, but reminding ourselves of His faithfulness in the past. That's why it's good to keep a journal—one friend keeps what she calls her "brag book" about God. I call mine a "God Sightings Book." We can also build an "altar" (something physical that serves as a reminder of what God did, such as planting a tree).

I love what one friend said: "Trusting God means that I actively, willfully refuse to worry and instead I fix my gaze on Christ and recite to myself Who Scripture reveals Him to be, His promises, and everything He has already done."

Another friend has been faithfully slogging through a long period of not seeing what God is doing: "Trusting God means trying to keep a posture of 'open hands, eyes up' and a curiosity that has us constantly wondering aloud, 'What are you up to, God? We can't wait to see.'"

I love how she and her husband live out their trust: *OK, Lord, we can trust You or we can freak out and make things happen on our own. That would be stupid. So let's go back to thanking*

You for the details of how You are proving Yourself faithful day after day. We trust You by NOT taking matters into our own hands. We trust You by continuing to wait.

Another friend drew on two different ways for her husband and her to make it through a particularly tough challenge: "One was to say out loud and mean it: 'Lord, we choose to trust in You through this.'" They would also repeat 2 Chronicles 20:12—"Lord, we don't know what to do, but our eyes are on You."

Continuing to Choose to Trust

So trust starts out as a choice to lean into God instead of ourselves, and it continues as we remind ourselves of WHAT is true, and that HE is true.

But trust sinks its roots down deep into our hearts and souls as we continue to choose dependence on the Lord instead of ourselves. There has to be an "on-goingness" to real trust, because it's not a one-time decision, but an ongoing position built by continual choices to keep on trusting.

One mama friend was shocked and rocked to learn her baby would be born with Down Syndrome. She wrote,

"Since having [my daughter], God has grown my trust in Him immensely. For me, trusting God means to really know His heart, His goodness, His love for me and my children, and knowing He has a perfect plan . . . even when He doesn't swoop in and make things easier. Trusting God is a daily relationship talking, listening, and praying with Him. Even when circumstances don't change and life is and will be difficult. Even when you see your child suffer—trusting Him looks like having an eternal focus, not an earthly one.

"Trusting Him looks like your 6-month old having heart surgery and meditating on worship music to remind you of His goodness and love. It's choosing him over and over again no matter if

His plan aligns with yours."

I responded to her, "My takeaway from your absolutely precious post is that trust can look like a kind of 'holy stubbornness' of choosing, over and over, to lash ourselves to a good and loving God who has proven His faithfulness over and over. Despite circumstances which only tend to obscure, not define, ultimate reality." I love to see evidences of that "holy stubbornness" in people!

Another friend pointed out that wavering trust can mean going off-track into the weeds of feelings. (Which are valuable as indicators of what's going on in our hearts, but are terrible indicators of truth! Feelings are like the warning lights on the dashboards of our cars, but they make awful compasses…)

"When my trust in God wavers even the least little bit, I have a tendency to lean toward my emotions. Not that emotions aren't valid and valuable, but when they begin to lead my thoughts, it can throw everything haywire. I start believing lies. The only antidote is seeking and speaking His Truth over every feeling—I suppose it's what the Scripture calls "taking every thought captive." I love the vivid language there: I can picture this tall strong person (the statement of Truth) coming up to one of my gone-wild feelings with a pair of handcuffs and shouting, 'You're under arrest!' I'm a visual person and sometimes this is what grappling in prayer looks like for me."

There is no passivity in trusting God. It's a very active way of choosing to think and remember and maintain our position of dependence on Him. In the book *Surrender to Love,* David Benner writes about teaching a group of non-swimmers how to snorkel. Because they had learned to trust him as a spiritual teacher, and they had learned the spiritual principle of surrender, they were willing to enter the water and let go of the side of the boat. They trusted him when he told them they would float. They trusted him when he told them they could breathe through

the snorkel without having to lift their heads out of the water.

Trusting God is like getting out of the boat, donning the snorkel, and trusting that the water will hold you up while you breathe with your face in the water.

It's leaning,

It's clinging.

It's releasing and relinquishing into God's hands.

And, at its core, trusting God is saying, "Thy will be done." Enjoy.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_does_trusting_god_look_like on November 19, 2019.

God Questions From Little Kids

Recently I asked some of the mamas of littles in our church, "What God questions are your kids asking?" While not definitive, here are some answers I trust you'll find helpful.

Who made God?

God has always existed. No one made God. Everything that has been made, has been made by someone or something else. Eventually, when we go back far enough, there has to be a Someone or a Something that is eternal—that was not created. Smart thinkers called philosophers call this an "uncaused

cause.”

How do we know this? Because there are some things we can’t figure out on our own, so God tells us in His word. Especially where Jesus is talking to His Father:

> “So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:5, 24).

How do we know the Bible is true?

The biggest way we can know is fulfilled prophecy. (Prophecies are a special kind of promise.) That means that God gave prophets information about the future that only He could know because He knows everything, and then the prophecies came true in even the smallest detail. This means that the Bible is a supernatural book because it is from God, who had human helpers to write down what He wanted written down.

We also have evidence supporting our belief that the Bible is a supernatural book:

Unity: The Bible’s books were written over 1500 years, by 40 different authors, on three different continents. But there is one consistent, big message from beginning to end: God loves us and has a big plan and purpose for His creation.

Bibliographical Evidence: The reason we have a Bible at all is that the original texts were copied many times over. There are 25,000+ handwritten copies of New Testament documents, with many variations. These variations allow us to see where errors and changes (such as spelling which does not change the meaning of a word) crept into the copying. There are no variations that question essential Christian beliefs.

Concerning the Old Testament: the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered between 1949 and 1956—thousands of fragments from every book of the Old Testament except Esther, including a complete copy of Isaiah. These fragments had been stored since 300-100 B.C. The book of Isaiah had not been changed in that entire time except for a few spelling changes. The scribes were exceedingly careful in copying God's word.

Archeological Evidence: Archeology, which is the study of old buried stuff, also supports details in the Bible. Not everything in the Bible has archeological support, but no archaeological findings have ever contradicted biblical details.

The evidence for both the Old and New Testaments shows that what we hold in our hands today is the same as what was written by the original authors.

How can Jesus be God but also God's Son? (In other words, how does this Trinity thing work?)

First of all, it's a hard idea that nobody fully understands because our minds are just too puny and small. It's okay not to get it. This truth is called a mystery, and nobody will understand it until heaven.

Here are three very important truths about God:

1. There is one God.
2. God is three distinct Persons.
3. Each Person is fully God.

The three equal Persons are the Father; the Son, Jesus; and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son. But all three Persons are still one God. Yes, it's confusing! Here's a hint: often when people refer to God they mean the Father. For example, when considering the question, "How can Jesus be God but also God's Son," we can

say that Jesus is divine, meaning He is God, but He is the Father's Son. He's not the same as the Father.

So when we're talking about God it is helpful to refer to either the Father, and Son or the Spirit.

We can see all three Persons of the Trinity at the baptism of Jesus. (Matthew 3:13-17)

Why can't we see God?

We can't see God the Father because He is spirit. That's like invisible energy, like sunlight. Or wind. And the Holy Spirit is, well, spirit. Jesus became a human being just like us when He left heaven to live on earth, but we can't see Him because He's back in heaven now. God is still on earth because God is everywhere, but He's invisible.

I know you'd like to see God, and you know what? So would I! Jesus knew we'd feel that way, which is why He said, "Blessed are those who believe without seeing Me." (John 20:29) But if you trust in Jesus, one day you will see Him very plainly in heaven.

Where is heaven?

Heaven is a spirit place. It's not like our house or our church or the park where we go, that you can find on a map or by walking there. I *can* tell you that when Jesus left the earth and went back to heaven, He went UP, and the Bible talks about Him coming back DOWN to earth. But it's not in the sky like the moon. When astronauts went up into space they didn't find heaven because heaven's not a place we can touch or see.

Why can't I hear God's voice? When I say, "Hello, God," why doesn't He talk back?

God doesn't speak to us the same way people do. That's because He is spirit. But Jesus taught us, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27) So hearing

His voice is different from hearing Mommy or Daddy's voice. You hear His voice with your heart. (Matthew 13)

We recognize God's voice from reading and hearing His word in the Bible. Everything God says lines up with what He tells us in His word, so we can learn to tell the difference between His true voice and our imagination. We have to practice listening. It's not easy, and we have to know what He says in His word in order to know what His voice sounds like.

If everything God makes is good, why did He make Satan?

Satan did not start out as an evil creature. God made him a beautiful, powerful, good angel. The good angel decided to become a bad angel by trying to become like God instead of being content with how God made him as a good angel.

Some people have asked why God made angels and people who could choose to disobey. That's because God wanted angels to CHOOSE to obey Him, and He wanted people to CHOOSE to love Him. Without the ability to choose, it wouldn't be real obedience or real love.

How will I know how to get to heaven when I die?

Getting to heaven from earth is like stepping from one room into a hallway or another room. Very simple, right? And you will probably have angels with you as well. Jesus will make sure to bring you to Himself, so you don't need to worry about it.

Before I was in your tummy was I in heaven with God?

No, you didn't exist before you were in my tummy. God knew you in His mind and in His heart, but He didn't create you until just the right time to form you inside my body. The only person who was in heaven with God the Father before He became

a tiny baby was Jesus.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/god-questions-from-little-kids/ on October 15, 2019.

Scraping Ceilings and Souls: Lessons on Sanctification From a Home Improvement Project

The process of upgrading and repairing Byron Barlowe's home helped him to see how God does the same kind of transformation in the souls of Christ-followers.

My wife and I are living in a suspended state of misery in our own home. It's like camping in a plastic-lined dustbin after a tornado blew furniture and books into random piles. Hidden in every crevice there's a thin fog of whitish dust and snow that won't melt. "How long, O Lord?" This odyssey started as we launched a long-awaited kitchen remodel, which would be stress enough: "Where's that sink they took out with the bulk waste—we need it back until the granite people come to install the new one!" Camping indoors again.

But then we succumbed to the contractor's compelling sell-job on removing popcorn from our ceilings—you know, that lumpy stuff hanging from 20th century ceilings. "They'll get it done and clean it up for you." No sweat, right? Right!

Anyone who's lived through a major renovation or addition can

testify to the disturbance. It's an all-encompassing project. "How many more trips to Home Depot?" I'm at the library writing this and will head to the shower at the YMCA. The paint makes it hard to sleep. Finally, we left for vacation. Disruption of routines and an exploded sense of place overwhelms and badgers us.

Yet God is in it. The ordeal is bringing out loads of attitudes and frustrations in me, especially since God seems to be doing an *attitude renovation* within me simultaneously. Is that dual lesson cruel of God, or spiritually strategic? Do I really grow when things sail smoothly along?

Yes, the promise of a new look and feel gets lost in the temporary tiresomeness of it all. The more you have, the more you pay in so many ways! Yet, what we had was not up to grade. Some of it was poised to cause disaster, like some plumbing in our kitchen. Replacing the working fridge with a cooler one (accidental pun) revealed a faulty valve. It had to be replaced. In the same way, my soul needs a makeover.

Like a master plumber, the Lord needs to hook up the new pipes of grace he has for me. He's renovating my heart. I need to grow into the new creation I already am. New openings for new blessings, old things made new. Getting hung up on my way of seeing issues or settling for an inadequate view of God's goodness calls for a major overhaul. The Lord is committed to make this happen as I somewhat grudgingly lay my life before him in submission—again. It hurts and is a mess, like the unexpected plumbing issue. But like the fridge fix, it makes possible a bounty of unspoiled fruit and prevents a nasty flood!

Back to the originally intended project: the process for the ceiling redux is a multi-step process. It requires the following:

- **scraping**: complete with the roar of compressor to spray

water, a sharp scraper, and the old junk that falls to floor (and into everything) like oatmeal or, well, wet popcorn

• "**mud**" to fill holes and fix gouges, a lot like grout for tile or what painters do with picture hanger holes

• **texture** for a new, updated look, smoother than the stuff from the days of puffy hairdos and disco music!

• And **paint** to "top" it off and complete the enjoyable and more livable change.

Simple processes aside, the disarray and disruption of either kind of renovation cannot be overstated. Every last physical item, habit, and way of life has been overturned, from sleeping to showering, eating to breathing itself. Repeat after me, self: *temporary pain for years of gain*. And isn't that what spiritual growth is like? Is it worth it? This is the operative question each time the Lord convicts us of sin or a character issue. Sanctification—the project of turning us into the real likeness of Christ—promises *eternal* reward and glory! It showcases the goodness and truth of God. Maturity matters, even though its development stinks at efficiency and convenience from a human perspective.

Because negative thought patterns burn into our minds and even have bodily effects, they need to be peeled off, removed. Kind of like the dragon skin of the character Eustace, the unbearably cynical and snooty boy character in C.S. Lewis's *Voyage of the Dawn Treader.* His spiritual blindness and insensitivity had to go but was painful to remove. Sin sticks and separates us from God, goodness and others. Due to its toxic spiritual effects, transformation can't be kept waiting. We, like young Eustace, need to release our sense of entitlement and thanklessness, rid ourselves of a false sense of pleasure and pride. He have to grow new skin. We too must be scraped over, repaired, remade and painted afresh.

What does this spiritual scraping of sanctification look like

in more detail? Well, not unlike ceiling refurbishment in so many ways.

Necessary Disruption

First, like those old popcorn ceilings, coverings in my soul simply must be replaced, and not for reasons of fashion. *Scraping ceilings and hearts is inconvenient*—the workers are in our house all day. The Lord does his work while we do our lives. There is never a "good time" for it. You just have to suck it up and have your life turned around a bit. I have been forced, in no small part by dealing with contractors and suppliers, to wrestle down thoughts like, "People are clueless—I wish they'd smarten up and pay attention." While there is truth behind those convictions as we all know, people have reasons for distraction and the unredeemed have no choice but to be self-centered and confused. The Lord has been revealing what it means to "value others above yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). When my protective and cynical dragon skin layers are removed, I begin to appreciate how gentle and ordered others' minds can be. Their skills and especially their ability to roll with messy, changeable situations amazes me. They are better than me at a lot of things. Regardless of my perceptions, God sees them as priceless and since he loves me supremely, so I can afford to regard them as more important than myself.

Healing Takes Time, Repetition

Second, *filling in the holes and cracks means going over the same "ground" again*. It's detailed work and has to set up and dry before you can move on. This does not feel efficient, yet it ensures that things are permanently restored. Often, the soulish equivalent of this comes in the form of deep fellowship and counseling—filling in the injury done to our souls with solid truth and love. The old becomes new again, the cracked smooth, the damaged healed. "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain

me” (Psalm 51:12).

The Grace of Preparation and Protection

In fact, prepping the house took the most time: taping plastic to the floor, draping furniture and ceiling fans, disconnecting light fixtures and removing air vents. It’s as if the protection of our belongings and dwelling takes precedence over the new look and underlying stuff. Isn’t this God’s way? As his Spirit renovates our lives, he lines us with protective layers of grace and love, draping us with the encouragement of prayers he evokes on our behalf and the love of fellow Christ-followers.

Renovation Takes Force

Third, just like ceiling overhauls, *retexturing* is yet another wearying pass over the same square footage for the purpose of renewal—*and it has to be forced*. Workers hold a little orange plastic tank attached to a hose that’s hooked up to a compressor, then spray the new coating on the freshly prepared surface. The pneumatic motor kicks into a whining screech that fills the house. Without that push, the spray can’t come out of the nozzle ten feet in the air. Similarly, the Spirit’s regeneration of our souls is noisy, messy, pushy and downright unpleasant. We may tire of reaching up to do our part in spreading newness onto the same surface from which God has removed the old stuff. Our shoulders and hearts get exhausted, sore from holding up our part of the work. The air is a bit nasty to breathe. But if our new life is to be realized, it has to be done, forcibly.

The Stuff of Spiritual Renovation

Just what is such *spiritual newness*? The material used is God’s Word illumined by his Spirit, creating new pathways for our minds, hearts and wills, right down to the bone and marrow of our beliefs. It means filling our minds with “whatever is true . . . honorable . . . right, . . . pure . . . lovely .

. . of good repute . . . any excellence [and] anything worthy of praise" (Philippians 4:8), being "transformed" and "renewed" in our minds (Romans 12:1-2), reckoning (deciding to be so) ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans
6:11). All of these fresh Spirit-pumped coatings can cover our internal overheads with new, living realities. That is, thinking and believing in a life-giving outlook that takes seriously the promise that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) is the ultimate renewal. Now, the house has a new sky, if you will, and the sun is ready to shine a bit brighter. As we capitulate to the often onerous process of scraping, mudding, and texturing, we experience a brand new covering for ceilings and souls-in-Christ. And now for the *coup de grace*!

New Paint, New Spiritual Robes

Painting is the final stage of this household transformation. Gone are the ugly, useless bits, replaced with the smoothness of shalom—peace-filled blessedness—where defects get filled in and fixed as we submit to the work. Likewise, as we are molded into Christ's likeness, we put on robes of pure white righteousness (Revelation 19:8; 3:4). So much can be said about the glory of holiness produced in willing saints. Suffice to say that the glory that awaits us outshines even the brightest hues applied to earthly surfaces. Our spiritual man is growing brighter, even as our bodies break down and fade. "We do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Many of us have ceilings that overhang us with old, outdated looks. All believers in Christ have rooms—perhaps whole houses—that need reworking. Let the scraping begin. It's worth it!

Back Infections and Heart Infections

My husband Ray knew something was wrong as soon as he got out of bed.



His lower back, where he'd had back surgery six weeks before, was wet. His t-shirt was wet. The sheet was wet. His fingers glistening with a strange wetness from reaching back to investigate, he asked me to check what was going on. I saw a rivulet of fluid pouring out of the top of his surgical incision. Something was really, really wrong.

As I gently pressed the skin around the incision, pus kept flowing out. He had a serious infection under the incision. It had been hidden, but it literally rose to the surface of his body and forced its way out. His problem wasn't that pus was being discharged from the inside to the outside—that was just the symptom, the manifestation of the true problem: a deep and serious infection.

He'd had the infection before he was forced to be aware of it. There were indications: fever, and just not feeling right.

The Lord is quite adept at using the physical to show us truths about the spiritual and emotional. I started seeing parallels between the two worlds.

The undealt-with, unhealed spiritual and emotional hurts in our souls don't just sit there under the surface—our awareness—forever. It's like emotional pus. Eventually it starts leaking out sideways: addictions, anger, isolation, rebellion, self-destruction. These are the presenting problems that drive people to seek help through recovery programs such as Re:generation and Celebrate Recovery, or counseling.

Just as a rivulet of pus wasn't Ray's true problem but merely a symptom, our heart issues are the true problem that Jesus wants to point to and say, "Let Me heal them. You can't do it on your own."

Ray's infection was so large that he needed "wash out" surgery. He needed a skilled surgeon, in the sterile, controlled environment of the operating room, to open up his incision and clean out the infection. Before he even got to the OR, the doctor ordered IV antibiotics to attack and disarm the destructive power of the multiplying bacteria. By the time the surgeon got to the washing-out stage, Ray's infection had been disarmed, turned into "clean gunk." No bacteria was left, just the debris of the now-dead bacteria.

In the spiritual realm, it's truth that functions like powerful antibiotics. Truth attacks the destructive power of lies and decision. There is still leftover debris of lies—bad thinking habits and bad behavior habits—but when the lies are disarmed, it's a lot easier to replace the old habits with new, healthy, godly habits.

This was a serious infection. The day after surgery, they put in a PICC line that threaded a tube from his upper arm into a vein, ending just above his heart. This is a very effective way to infuse health-building antibiotics into his body, medicine that can't be taken orally—it has to be pumped directly into his bloodstream. He gets five antibiotic infusions a day, which we can do at home instead of needing to be hospitalized or having to go a doctor's office (which would

be hard to do at 6 a.m. and 9 p.m.!).

The PICC line allows us to keep a constant level of antibiotic in his blood. He needs this constant flow to attack the infection over a long period of time. We also need a constant infusion of truth into our souls, into our minds, to counteract the destructive power of lies and deceptions and schemes. In fact, one study revealed the it takes a minimum of four infusions of truth weekly through time in the Word for spiritual growth and healthiness.

I like thinking about the infusion of truth through God's Word as I connect the tubing to Ray's PICC line catheter. God is so good to give us physical lessons to show us spiritual truths!

Ray sure couldn't heal himself on his own. He pointed out that he had to surrender control over this entire "adventure" (to use my dad's word to describe his cancer journey). There was absolutely nothing he could do to fix the spinal stenosis that squeezed nerves, causing shooting pains down the backs of his legs, and he couldn't heal the infection that came later. He had to place himself in the hands of the surgeon both times. He had to place himself in the hands of the anesthesiologists to put him to sleep and wake him up. He had to place himself in the hands of the nurses to administer his pain meds and the IV antibiotics. He had to surrender control to those who knew how to help him.

At any point, he could have shut down the process—not having the surgery, or walking out of the hospital, or refusing the home infusions of IV antibiotics. He could have refused to wear the back brace after the spine surgery; he could have refused to submit to the BLT restrictions (no bending, lifting or twisting).

But that would have also shut down the healing.

When we have soul sickness—a heart infection, if you will—we need to entrust ourselves into the hands of people more

educated in the healing process than we are. We need to surrender our false sense of control and invite others to lead us from sickness into health. And we need to not shut down the process by thinking we know better, or thinking we're fixed or even just "good enough." We need to not push back against restrictions suggested by those who know better than we do what it will take to help us climb of our pits to get to the place of spiritual and emotional health.

God provides help for physical challenges like infections, and through the "one anothers" of scripture He provides help for spiritual and emotional challenges as well. And He lets us connect the dots to learn transferable concepts from each.

This blog post originally appeared at
https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/back_infections_and_heart_infections
on Sept. 4, 2019.

The Thought Police Are Here

Recently, in the same week, I watched two strikingly polar opposite events unfold on my Facebook feed. One was the long-awaited, long-prayed-for birth of a precious baby girl whose daddy had left homosexuality and repented of a gay identity as he pursued intimacy with Christ. After several years of sexual sobriety and spiritual growth, he was actually quite surprised to find himself starting to be attracted to girls. I remember him saying, "If you think puberty is rough the first time, you should try it at 28!" I was privileged to watch him weep with gratitude through his wedding to a beautiful lady, and pray for him as he became a pastor of an inner city church. And

finally, after a failed pregnancy and several failed adoptions, God gave him and his wife the desires of their heart when their little one was born.

This happened the same week that Amazon banned a number of books offering hope for people struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions or gender confusion, people like my friend. A gay activist convinced Amazon that the books by a clinical psychologist who had successfully treated hundreds of men who did not want to be gay, and other books presenting a biblical view of sexuality, are dangerous. He said they cause LGBT people to hate themselves and inflict grave psychological damage. Because no one should be able to say there's anything wrong with same-sex relationships and behavior.

It's really not any different than if a coalition of distilleries, vintners and brewing companies went after Alcoholics Anonymous to shut them down, proclaiming that it's dangerous and even wrong to support people who want to stop drinking. And there's something wrong with people not wanting alcohol to control or even destroy their lives, because drinkers are who they are and they need to embrace this reality.

Critics use the pejorative labels "gay cure" or "conversion therapy" to shut down the voices of those offering help to those who want it. No reputable therapist, counselor, or pastoral care person will attempt to force change on someone who doesn't want it, but what about those who *do* want help? What about another friend of mine, who sought help when he was deep in the weeds of his gay life? When I asked what made him reach out for help over 20 years ago, he answered, "God-induced misery. If the Holy Spirit truly lives within, there is no peace, there is no stability, there is no hiding. As James says, The double minded man is unstable in all his ways."

But technology has allowed "the Thought Police" to shut down

the voices they don't like, like those of my friends. The stewards of high tech hold the power to decide what they want people to hear and see.

• John Stonestreet's recent Breakpoint commentary{1} relates how Facebook deleted a pro-lifer's post quoting Saint Augustine, about focusing on the sins of others to avoid examining our own. Facebook says St. Augustine's comment violated community standards.

• YouTube has restricted a quarter of Dennis Prager's conservative videos, including one on the Ten Commandments (because it mentions murder).

• Smarter Every Day's resident engineer (and winsomely outspoken Christ-follower) Destin Sandlin created three powerful videos explaining how YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook are being manipulated to control what we see.{2}

• A single pro-LGBT activist convinced Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Google to remove the Living Hope Ministries app, grossly misrepresenting LHM's mission and activity as dangerous and even "life-threatening." The app was filled with expository teachings of various books of the Bible, weekly devotions, and personal testimonies of God's transformational work. The app had happily resided on all platforms for more than three years.

This app was removed for supposedly being life-threatening to LGBTQ youth, yet the same hosts offer more than a dozen pro-gay apps that are designed to encourage sexual exploration and provide a means for individuals to hook-up for anonymous sex—an activity that has proven to be dangerous and even life-threatening.{3}

These are examples of the Thought Police in action.

This is why it is more important than ever before for our thinking to be more shaped, more informed by the truth of the

Word of God than by the gatekeepers of Big Tech.

For example, we need to embrace the truth of 1 Corinthians 6, describing the first century church that had former homosexuals in it:

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such *were* some of you.** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (vv. 9-11, emphasis mine)

I keep thinking about personal friends of mine, and their families, that the Thought Police don't want the world to know about: men and women who have turned from a gay identity to finding their identity in Christ, who have reconciled their faith and sexuality to honor and glorify God in it. Some have developed an attraction to their now-spouse, and are happily living faithful lives of service in their churches and in the world. Some report that their same-sex attractions haven't changed, but instead of a blaring, controlling force, they have retreated to white noise in the background of their lives. Their stories are real, and life-giving, and fulfilling.

But you won't know about it if the Thought Police have their way.

Notes

1. www.breakpoint.org/2019/07/the-point-saintly-censorship/
2. www.smartereveryday.com/
3. www.livehope.org/2019/04/23/lightintodark/

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_thought_police_are_here
on July 23, 2019.

"My Daughter Says She's a Boy—What Do I Do?"

A real question from a real mom: "Sue, my daughter insists she's a boy. She has rejected all things feminine since she was a toddler. Now as a 15-year-old she says there's a mismatch between her brain and her body. She wants "top surgery" (a double mastectomy) and testosterone to bring her insides and outsides into alignment. She says God made her this way and He doesn't make mistakes so she is embracing a transgender identity. What do I do?"

Oh sister. I am so sorry. I can only begin to imagine the pain, the chaos, and the conflict this is causing in your family.

Let's start with, what do we know is true?

1. God loves her. She is very dear to Him. He made her in His image and likeness. He sent His Son to give His life for her, proving once and for all how infinitely precious she is. And He may just be especially tender toward her, when we consider Isaiah 42:3—"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;"
2. The Creator God made her a girl. He has plans and purposes for her as a female.
3. She's only 15, and her pre-frontal cortex won't finish developing for another 10 years. She's not in a position

to judge accurately the long-term effects of choices she makes today.
4. You are an adult, and you can see the long-term effects. It's essential that you not cave to pressure.
5. This issue is so rife with conflict and political correctness that everything I'm about to say will make someone furious.

What do you do? Well, first, you **love her well**. You stay focused on the wonderful gifts and talents and personality that you appreciate about her, and you keep affirming her for these aspects of who she is. Her sense of self, her sexuality, is not WHO she is, it's HOW she is. For right now.

Like any child or teenager (or adult, for that matter), she longs for her parents' acceptance—but acceptance is not the same as approval. Acceptance means acknowledging their experience, and their perception of reality, without endorsing the conclusions they come to or the choices they make. (Consider that God accepts us, Romans 14:18 and 15:7, but He certainly doesn't approve of everything we do!)

Loving her well means listening in order to communicate that you are seeking to understand her. It means showing compassion. Believing that one is transgender is *hard*. Those with internal conflicts about their gender are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, a sense of not belonging, and often have thoughts of suicide. She needs your tenderness.

What else do you do? **Educate yourself about this issue**, so you can speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) to your daughter and to friends and family as this comes into the light.

Gender Dysphoria is a thinking disorder, not a body disorder. If your daughter announced she were a cat, or a unicorn, how would you deal with that? Dr. Phil McGraw teaches that the first test that one's thinking is rational is that it has to be grounded in objective fact{1}. Our sex—male or female—is an

objective truth that becomes apparent at birth. God, who knits us together in our mother's womb where we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:13-14), is the one who chooses and then reveals His plan for our gender. That is objective fact. If someone thinks or feels that they are something other than what God has made them to be, it's their thinking that is skewed, not their body. Unfortunately, our culture is very good at elevating feelings above objective truth, and that is at the core of the transgender issue.

I think that when children and adolescents claim to be the opposite sex, it's really about **not fitting into gender stereotypes**. You said your daughter "rejected all things feminine" since she was very small. That was about pink and purple sparkly princess dresses and bows in her hair, right? And she hated them? I respectfully suggest it wasn't femininity she was rejecting, it was a certain KIND of femininity, the stereotype we as a culture (particularly a culture infected with Disney princess images) label feminine. God also delights to make sporty, athletic, very physical and competitive girls who don't really care for frilly, girly-girl clothes. They can have a hard time playing house because nobody wins! These girls are still sensitive and compassionate, still emotional and verbal, but they'd rather be outside climbing trees and throwing perfect spirals to the neighborhood boys. These are not inferior girls, they're not lesser-than girls, they're just not in the majority. They are girls who love sports and are good at it, or girls who don't care for dresses or nail polish, or girls who just don't get the superficiality of many of their girl peers. They are the kind of girl God made them to be. When they are supported and celebrated for the kind of girl they are, their sense of disconnect with their femininity can decrease as their awareness of God's good creation of femininity increases.

Please see my post The Gender Spectrum for more information.

Sometimes, **the impact of various kinds of abuse** can make a

girl think that it is neither good nor safe to be a girl. They can convince themselves that if they were a boy, they could protect themselves and they wouldn't be at risk because boys don't get abused or molested. (Which, of course, is not true!) The solution is not to impersonate a boy and mutilate her body, but to get help processing the deep soul wounds of abuse and molestation.

Just as depressed people can often take comfort and refuge in the idea of ending their pain through suicide, those who experience a sense of misalignment with their birth sex can put their hopes in transitioning to the opposite sex through cross-hormone therapy and ultimately surgery. But very few are aware of the testimonies of those who regret doing this. Walt Heyer of sexchangeregret.com has recently released a book, *Trans Life Survivors*, comprised of letters and emails from people who are very sorry for what they did to their bodies: the ongoing medical problems and the deep sense of loss at mutilating their bodies.{2}

I know you are afraid of your daughter committing suicide because that is the drum that is constantly beaten by the pro-trans side: "If you don't cooperate with your child's plans to transition, there's a high suicide rate when kids are not supported in their preferred gender identity." That is a bone-chilling fear, one my husband and I personally know in our family. But you should know two things: first, it's not necessarily true. See the article "The Suicide Myth" here: www.transgendertrend.com/the-suicide-myth/ Second, we do know that the suicide rate is 20 times higher in those who DO transition.

In a commentary titled "Sex Reassignment Doesn't Work: Here's the Evidence," Ryan T. Anderson writes,

> When 'the tumult and shouting dies,' it proves not easy nor wise to live in a counterfeit sexual garb. The most thorough follow-up of sex-reassigned people—extending over 30 years

> and conducted in Sweden, where the culture is strongly supportive of the transgendered—documents their lifelong mental unrest. Ten to 15 years after surgical reassignment, the suicide rate of those who had undergone sex-reassignment surgery rose to *20 times that of comparable peers*."{3} (Emphasis mine)

This means that the risk of suicide is far greater In those who transition, than those who don't.

Be aware of the power of social media. One of my heroes is Collin Karchner, who is "on a crusade to save teens from social media's potential destruction to their self-esteem and mental health, and empowering parents to reconnect with their kids." (savethekids.us/) I am amazed at the number of young lives he is saving by showing them how destructive social media can be, and the good that happens when teens cut themselves off from the negativity online. The destructive forces of social media certainly manifest in the growing numbers of kids and teens thinking they are transgender.

Recently, my colleague Kerby Anderson had me on his Point of View radio program talking about Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria, which is a part of social contagion. He posted this article on the ministry website: pointofview.net/articles/rapid-onset-gender-dysphoria/

Tumblr is a magnet for young girls, who are extremely vulnerable to the ideas and images on social media, and it is egregiously pro-trans. You should know about this social contagion phenomenon on that platform here: 4thwavenow.com/tag/tumblr-trans-contagion/

As I said above, educate yourself. But know that the pro-trans activists have been extremely successful at shutting down the voices of those concerned about the full-steam-ahead transgender agenda. You'll have to do some digging.

Check out the work and the writings of psychologist Dr.

Kenneth Zucker, who counseled over 560 children and teens with gender confusion at his clinic in Toronto over 35-40 years. He found that when kids were able to go through puberty naturally, Gender Identity Disorder (a phrase he coined) resolved in 98% of boys and 80% of girls. This is profound! Apparently, there is something about the rush of the correct hormones during puberty that resets things internally in the vast majority of adolescents. The best treatment for those who feel at odds in their body is to wait and watch.

You should also know about Dr. Paul McHugh, for many years the Psychiatrist-in-Chief at Johns Hopkins University, who shut down the sex change clinic when he found that post-surgically, the patients still had their neuroses. In the article "Surgical Sex," he wrote,

> "When I became psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins, I realized that by doing sex-change operations the hospital was fundamentally cooperating with a mental illness. We would do better for these patients, I thought, by concentrating on trying to fix their minds and not their genitalia."{4}

Be very skeptical of anything from WPATH, World Professional Association for Transgender Health. They are completely uninterested in providing any balance to their reports or articles, and their poorly designed studies have no control groups. (For more information, watch this video from pediatric endocrinologist Dr, Quentin Van Meter, "The Terrible Fraud of 'Transgender Medicine'" at youtu.be/6mtQ1geeD_c)

My last suggestion is the most important. ***PRAY.*** This is a spiritual warfare battle. The enemy prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8), and he is coming after our kids like nothing we've ever seen before. I have seen numerous people snatched from the enemy's claws as God does "spiritual cataract surgery," allowing them to see what they were blind to before, because of the faithful

prayers of faithful parents and family members. Pray that the Lord will strengthen and protect your daughter from the evil one (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Pray for the eyes of her heart to be enlightened so she can see the truth about herself (Ephesians 1:18).

Pray and don't give up.

Notes

1. drphilintheblanks.com, Living by Design Worksheets.
2. sexchangeregret.com/bookstore/
3. www.heritage.org/gender/commentary/sex-reassignment-doesnt-work-here-the-evidence
4. www.firstthings.com/article/2004/11/surgical-sex

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/my-daughter-says-shes-a-boy-what-do-i-do
on June 11, 2019.

What is Art, Anyway?

When my dear friend Laura Helms told me about integrating her biblical worldview with how she teaches high school art, I was fascinated and asked her to write about her approach.



For the last nine years I have had the privilege of teaching visual arts in the public school system here in Texas. Each year I start off with one question on the board: “What is art?” Students give a wide range of answers but they usually land somewhere near the phrase “art can be whatever you want it to be.”

This year I laid out an assortment of objects ranging from pottery to paintings to piles of trash that I pulled from the garbage can that morning. Through many giggles and lots of questions, many of the students still firmly asserted that all of these items could be considered “art.” While you may agree or disagree with the used candy wrapper being called “art,” art is a form of visual communication that encompasses the values and beliefs of the maker. Effective art communicates those beliefs clearly to the viewer. And I believe good art communicates truth to the viewer.

I don’t get upset when my students hold the candy wrapper up as “art.” I don’t get upset because I know why they think that way. Matthew 6:22-23 says, “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” My primary goal as an art teacher is to help students learn how to see clearly. The goal is to teach them to look for truth—objective truth rather than subjective truth.

Art history is a reflection of what cultures believe about truth. The shift in western art movements closely correlates to changes in public value systems. Nietsche famously wrote

“God is dead” in the late 1800s. After two world wars, the rise of Nihilism in the West, and the elevation of reactionary self-determination supported by the growing popularity of psychology, artistic thought turned inward for answers to the human experience. Artists looked at a world going up in flames and thought to themselves, *Maybe it is true. Maybe I am on my own and this is all there is to life.* Artists created art in their own image, validating their own truths and personal beliefs. When our eyes do not work, we do not see clearly. It is not shocking, but it is heartbreaking. When we exchange the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25), we hope to find life in things that cannot give us life.

I want to briefly share with you the journey my students take each year. Together we first identify our beliefs. What do you think the definition of art really is? What is the purpose of art? How do you know if art is good art? We start by identifying what we believe about “art.”

Next, we look at how we came to hold those beliefs. Together we look at history, philosophy and the evolution of Western thought. We talk about wars and Darwin, about appropriation and human rights. We look at the change in technology and how it influenced human interaction. We talk about religion and worldviews. We pinpoint large ideological shifts that show up in history. Did you know that the phrase “art is about personal expression” would have been laughed at before 1900? And the phrase “art can be what I want it to be” didn’t show up in public thought until the 1960s. As a class, we look at these origins and take note of how they have shaped our own thoughts and beliefs about art.



Once students can articulate what they believe about art and the origins of those beliefs, we take a second look. How do you know your beliefs are true? How has your understanding of art changed after your studies? Students think they are profound when they make grandiose statements like “art is whatever I want it to be.” The goal isn’t to change their beliefs. The goal is to teach them to see clearly.

I think we all need to go to art class. At our core, none of us want to be fools, trusting in false hopes. We all desire to see truth. It is my goal to help them learn how to seek it and find it. When was the last time you asked yourself, “How do I know this to be true?”

Now go make some good, weird art.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/what-is-art-anyway/
on April 30, 2019.

What Difference Does the Resurrection Make?

Sue Bohlin suggests four ways the resurrection of Jesus can make a difference in the lives of believers today.

What difference does the resurrection make—in our lives? It's the most important event in all of human history. Where's the "so what" for today?

I meditated on this question for weeks, eventually creating a list too long for this blog post. So let me share my favorites.

All pain and suffering will be redeemed and resolved.

I've lived in a body with a disability since I got polio at eight months old and was paralyzed from the waist down. I got some use of my left leg and hip back, but I had to wear a steel and leather brace for the first several years of my life. Every step I've taken, I have limped. I had several orthopedic surgeries and 14 years of physical therapy.

We used to sing a song in church that made me cry Every. Single. Time.

> **You Hold Me Now** {1}
> For eternity
> All my heart will give
> All the glory to Your Name
>
> No weeping, no hurt or pain
> No suffering
> You hold me now
> You hold me now
>
> No darkness, no sick or lame
> No hiding, You hold me now
> You hold me now

The first time I walk without a limp will be in my resurrected body, in heaven where there will be no polio, no weakness, no limping. There will be no scooters in heaven. No wheelchairs. No walkers.

No insulin pumps.

No percussion vests for cystic fibrosis.
No cochlear implants for the deaf.
No braille books or signs for the blind.
No dentures or dental implants.
No prosthetics.

All the technology and tools we have developed to help people deal with life in a fallen, broken world will be obsolete and never needed again. The fallen, broken world will be resurrected too! Full of glory and beauty and strength and perfection.

What difference does the resurrection make? It affects how I live through times of pain and suffering. I know I can bear it if there is a purpose and God is going to make everything right.

The resurrection means all pain and suffering is temporary, and there is meaning to it.

The resurrection means God sustains me through the difficult times because He is doing a beautiful thing in me that I will only be able to see and appreciate in my resurrection body.

A second difference the resurrection makes is that ***heaven is real, so we don't have to fear death.***

The resurrection means that if we are believers, if we have trusted in Christ, when we cross over from life on earth to life in heaven, we will be with Jesus and with all the people, starting with Adam and Eve, who put their trust in Him.

It means we can look forward to being reunited with our loved ones who have died.

I'm looking forward to seeing my daughter Becky again. She's been with Jesus 42 years. I'm looking forward to being there when our sons Curt and Kevin meet their sister, who was born and died before they came along. I'm looking forward to seeing

my mom and dad, my grandparents and other family members, including my wonderful cousin George who just moved to heaven last week.

We can look forward to meeting super distant family members and even people we heard about but never met, like the apostles and Saint Augustine and Corrie Ten Boom and Billy Graham.

And since heaven is real, it means we don't have to fear death.

When we put our trust in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, death is merely a doorway into the next life. We leave our bodies and step across the threshold of heaven to be with Jesus.

There are so many stories of what a difference the resurrection makes in the life of a believer as they face death!

Recently I posted a question on Facebook asking friends to share dying stories of heaven-bound believers. I got so many delightful responses!

"My friend Charla was a hospice nurse for many years. She tells of one man, O.J., on his deathbed. His best friend, Floyd, had gone to heaven several years earlier. O.J. had been comatose for a day or so. Charla said he was peaceful and close to death as she sat with him, holding his hand and speaking soothing words to him. All of a sudden, with his eyes still closed, O.J. broke into a brilliant smile, lifted his other hand up into the air and said expectantly, 'Floyd!' and he went right to heaven! Charla said she'd held his hand on Earth as Floyd grasped his hand in heaven."

"In the last moments of my father's life, he was beaming with joy as he saw his friends on the other side waiting for him. He held up his hands, greeting them by name, 'Brother Harold!

Brother Bob!'"

3 weeks before my believing aunt passed, she saw her husband who had died several years before, in white robes reaching out his arms to her. Then while in the hospital, Aunt Rose walked by a statue of Jesus and paused as if talking to him. My cousin asked, "Mom, are you talking to Jesus?"

She said, "Yes, and He said, 'Hang in there Rosie, you'll be with Me shortly.'" A few days later, she told my cousins what she was seeing as the curtain between heaven and earth grew more and more transparent.

She exclaimed that heaven was so beautiful, so filled with warmth and kindness. Her daughter asked her if it was like Hawaii and she laughed and said, "No, it's like a warm summer afternoon in Wisconsin." The week she died, she started seeing Jesus in a white robe, and then the day before she died the robe turned gold. That night she told my cousin, "Go to bed. You're keeping me from meeting Jesus." She died several hours later.

What difference does the resurrection make? It means when loved ones die, it's just a "see you later" rather than a forever goodbye.

It means that as you get rolled from pre-op to the operating room and get ready to undergo anesthesia, you can relax in peace knowing that if anything were to go wrong during surgery, you'd wake up in heaven.

It means being legitimately concerned about the dying process hurting, but not concerned about what happens one minute after death.

The resurrection means death has been robbed of its power and its sting.

Another difference the resurrection makes is that ***we become***

more aware of the unseen, eternal world.

Since Jesus said He had come from heaven, and that He would rise from the dead in 3 days—*and then He did!*—that validates everything He taught about the unseen and eternal dimension of life.

We can become more aware of the fact that we live in two worlds at the same time, the seen and physical world and the unseen spiritual world (2 Corinthians 4:18).



I love to snorkel in the Caribbean. I love being able to look at the beautiful fish and corals of the underwater world while effortlessly breathing the air of the above-water world. I love functioning in two worlds at the same time.

What difference does the resurrection make? It means we can operate in two worlds simultaneously.

It means we can learn to focus on the unseen, eternal realm as more real than the temporal realm.

It means we can intentionally become so much more effective in our prayers because we start to see we truly do release God's power into other people's lives and situations when we pray.

Operating in two realms at the same time means we can sit in our living rooms and release the light of God's truth and power into legal and political situations in our nation's capital.

We can be walking or driving in our cars wherever we are and

pour the grace of God's power into the hearts of persecuted Christians on the other side of the world.

We can read or hear the news on the internet or the newspaper and lift up events and needs and problems to the throne of God no matter where they are.

The resurrection means we can wear "invisible snorkel gear" and operate in the earthly realm and the spirit realm at the same time.

A final difference the resurrection makes is that ***we will be married to Christ.***

The church, the body of Christ, will be married to our heavenly bridegroom Jesus.

The greatest earthly marriages are still only a foretaste of the ultimate, perfect marriage between the Bride of Christ and the Lamb.

The best, healthiest earthly marriages are still between two broken, fallen sinners who hurt and irritate and annoy each other and are in constant need of forgiveness.

The very best marriages are not ultimately fulfilling and completing because only Jesus can fill and complete us. There are still times of loneliness and not being understood and wondering, "Is this as good as it gets?" Yes, because earthly marriages are not the ultimate purpose of your life.

If you are single, even if by God's grace you are content in your singleness, there is still a longing for connection that eludes you on earth because you were made for a deep and perfect union and connection with Jesus.

What difference does the resurrection make? It means we will be bound up with the rest of the body of Christ to become His bride.

And these three differences that the resurrection make, I believe, are only the tip of the iceberg.

1. Hillsong Music, words and music by Joel Houston & Aodhan King

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