

# Loving God Through Xmas Music?

From Thanksgiving to Christmas Day, the sounds of Christmas music are everywhere: stores, TV specials, many radio stations. Every year, the biggest oldies station in Dallas becomes “The Christmas Station,” this year starting in mid-November.

There are two ways to respond to Christmas music, I think. One way is to let it stream unfiltered into our hearts and minds as the background noise of our December lives. The other is to be intentional about categorizing what we hear, letting it all remind us of “the reason for the season.”

I suggest that Christmas music falls into four categories, and we can mentally tag each song with the appropriate category as we listen:

## **Songs About Weather**

What do sleigh rides have to do with Jesus’ birthday? Nothing. But a number of songs we only hear in December are focused on northern-hemisphere weather. Key words are snow, cold, frosty, winter, and jingle bells (because they belong on sleighs, apparently).

## **Songs About Fantasy**

All songs about Santa Claus, the Grinch, elves, and Frosty the Snowman belong in this category. Make-believe characters have nothing to do with the birth of the Savior, but we only hear them at Christmas.

## **Songs About “Xmas Feelings”**

There are lots of songs invoking warm and fuzzy feelings about Christmas, and being together, and good cheer. It’s “the happiest season of all,” right? Other songs highlight what the singer wants for Christmas, ranging from a kid’s two front

teeth to the not-T00-greedy “Santa Baby” song: a fur coat, a car, a yacht and a ring. Be sure to hang some mistletoe so you can score a kiss from somebody. (Except that given the current movement to expose sexual harassment and crimes, that might not be the best move right now.) I call these “Xmas Feelings” because although the songs are played at Christmastime, none of them have anything to do with the reason we celebrate Christmas in the first place. It’s a totally secular feel-good holiday, so we can just X out the Christ of Christmas.

### **Songs About the Birth of Christ**

Aaaah . . . *now* we’re talking! Most songs about Jesus’ birth are either Christmas carols, long venerated for the very good reason that they proclaim truth. We call them carols, but they’re really hymns that celebrate the Incarnation, God leaving heaven to become man. Most carols show deep insight into the glorious mystery of the Incarnation. “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” proclaims, “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity.” My favorite Christmas carol, “Joy to the World,” exhorts us—and the whole world—to embrace the Savior: “Let earth receive her King, Let every heart prepare Him room, And heaven and nature sing. . . .”

In addition to Christmas carols, some more modern songs teach biblical doctrine. “Mary Did You Know,” written by Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene in 1991, elevates Jesus in a most worshipful way. “Mary did you know . . . when you kiss your little Baby you kiss the face of God? . . . This sleeping Child you’re holding is the Great I AM?” Still gives me goosebumps. Every time I hear it.

The continual presence of Christmas music is a good opportunity to practice discernment with every song by asking, “Which category does this song go in?” Using biblical wisdom to think intentionally is one way we can love God with our minds, as Jesus said is part of the greatest commandment (Luke 10:27). But then we can go on to a second step, which is to connect the dots between the songs and the Lord behind “the

reason for the season.”

When we hear a song about weather: “Lord, I praise You for being the creator of winter—and spring, summer and fall.”

When we hear a song about fantasy characters: “Lord, I praise You for being real and true, and not make-believe like Santa or Frosty.”

When we hear a song about Xmas feelings: “Lord, the longings of the heart for love and for home and for belonging are all met in You. Thank You for drawing me into relationship with You as the giver of these good things.”

When we hear a song about Jesus’ birth: “Lord, Happy Birthday! Thank You for leaving heaven and coming to earth to reconcile us with the Father. Thank You for this wonderful song that reminds us that You are Lord.”

Bonus points for identifying “category error” songs that mix fantasy and truth. Examples: “Here Comes Santa Claus” mixes the made-up Santa and the True God:

“Peace on earth will come to all, if we just follow the light  
So let’s give thanks to the Lord above ‘cause Santa Claus  
comes tonight.”

Then there’s “Up on the Rooftop”:

Up on the rooftop  
Click, click, click  
Down through the chimney with  
Good Saint Nick

Santa is not Saint Nicholas, a 4th-century Christ-follower in modern-day Turkey. St. Nicholas didn’t come down chimneys with toys for good little girls and boys! Santa is fantasy; “St. Nick” is real.

Happy singing . . . and thinking!

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c](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/loving_god_through_xmas_music)  
on December 12, 2017.

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## What a Day of ThanksLIVING Looks Like

“Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father . . .” (Ephesians 5:20). That’s a pretty tall order: *all the time?* for *all* things? Seriously?

When I was first challenged to obey this scripture, some 44 years ago, I thought that surely it wasn’t translated properly. Or maybe there was a footnote. Or an asterisk. Surely *some* kind of loophole, right?

Nope. It means just what it says. We can continually give thanks for all things because if God is truly in control, then everything He allows us to experience comes with His permission-and thus He has a plan. For everything He allows. Even if we can’t see it.

It became a way of life for me, and has been a habit for over four decades. With the celebration of Thanksgiving looming next week, I paid attention to what that long-standing habit sounds like in the course of a day.

[Upon waking] “Oh, it’s morning. Thank You, Lord, that my radio came on at the right time. That means we had uninterrupted electricity all night.” Alternatively, “Oh, it’s morning. Thank You so much for the blessing of being able to

sleep till I woke up, with no alarm! What a blessing!”

[Upon turning over in bed] “Lord, thank You so, so much that I can shift position without pain now! Thank you again for the stem cell treatment that made it possible!”

[Upon getting out of bed into my mobility scooter] “Lord, {ouch ouch ouch} I thank You that the pain of moving from the bed to my scooter will dissipate quickly. And thank You again that I have a scooter for getting around.”

[Standing up to transfer from the scooter to the commode] “Owwwww! But Lord, I thank You for the grab bars to lean on, and thank You for the new tall handicap toilet. It is so much easier to use this than the regular ones everywhere else.”

[Riding to the kitchen] “Lord, thank You for speed and painlessness! I love being the fastest one in the house!”

[Making coffee] “Lord! Bless You for creating coffee! Thank You for caffeine! Thank You for my coffee maker, and half and half, and sweetener. Thank You for mugs. Thank You for Central Market and the wonderful flavored coffees I can get there. Thank You for blessing [our son] Kevin in the coffee world—Lord, order his steps today in Nepal while he’s investigating becoming coffee partners with farmers there, and use him to help fight sex trafficking through coffee instead.”

[Moving to the couch] “Oh Lord, owwwww—thank You that the pain will subside quickly, and thank You for our couch and the table to hold my coffee while I read Your word. Thank You for a Bible in English and the ability to read. Thank You for the Holy Spirit to illumine its meaning to me. Thank You for an online Bible reading program from my church that allows me to join with thousands of people worldwide in reading the same passage and then reading a devotional from one of our members. Thank You for the technology that allows me to affirm the devo writer and share my take on today’s reading.”

[Preparing to take a shower] “Thank You again, Lord, for this magnificent roll-in shower You gave us in the recent renovation to make our house handicap-friendly. Thank You for the grab bars and for the bench seat that lets me sit down. Thank You for the hand-held shower. And for hot water. And for clean hot water! And for 24/7 clean hot water! Thank You for the blessing of being able to take it for granted, but Lord, I don’t want to take it for granted.”

[Getting in the car] “Thank You, Lord, for [our son who lives with us] Curt’s availability to help me get in and out of the car and take care of the scooter. Thank You that the barometric pressure is stable today so my pain level is lower. Thank You that no rain is forecast. Oh, there’s our trash bin at the edge of the driveway; thank You for helping Ray remember to get it out before the garbage truck came by. And thank You for garbage pick-up, Lord! Thank You for people willing to take care of that for us!”

[Driving] “Thank You for paved roads, Lord. And for traffic lights. And for the engineers who set all that up. Thank You that everybody drives on the same side of the street. And thank You for everybody honoring that red lights mean stop and green lights mean go. Thank You that I can read all the road signs and street sights because they’re in English. I remember sounding out the Cyrillic letters in Belarus like a kindergartner, and thank You for helping me do that when I was able to go, but today I’m thankful to be surrounded by English!”

[Arriving at church for Bible study] “Thank You, Lord, for the growing number of friends in ‘Sue’s Scooter Army’ who are trained to help me by getting the scooter out of the car and bringing it to me at the driver’s seat. Thank You for their sweet joy in genuinely being glad to help. Thank You for making my love language acts of service, so it makes me feel so loved!”

[Riding into the church] “Lord, thank You for electricity, and comfort because of the heating and air conditioning. Thank You there’s nobody threatening to arrest or persecute us for coming to church. Thank You for the freedom to study Your word publicly . . . and Lord, today I am so very very grateful for the privilege of teaching Your word to precious women who are so teachable and so appreciative. Thank You for the ramp that allows me to ride my scooter onto the stage. Thank You for the face mic that lets me keep my hands free. Thank You for the lights, and the padded chairs, and the audio system, and for Powerpoint that’s working so everybody can see the slides I prepared. Thank You for the other leaders who helped me do my run through the other day so I could make my lecture even better. Thank You, Lord, for your Holy Spirit to empower me to speak Your truth in Your strength, to Your glory.”

And that takes me to 10:30. That’s what thanksLIVING looks like.

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## **Did the Hurricanes Wash Away the Hate?**

In the midst and aftermath of the destruction caused by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, I saw a number of comments in social media marveling at how people came together and served each other regardless of race, religion, or any other “us/them” division. Immediately before the hurricanes, the

subject of hate was hot and furious in the various media. Then suddenly people weren't talking about it. Something much bigger and much more immediate consumed our attention.

So that left an intriguing question: did the hurricanes wash away the hate?

Alas, no.

It didn't take long before a third hurricane, Maria, decimated America's own Puerto Rico, and the horrific humanitarian crisis became fodder for politically-related contempt and ugliness in the media. This was immediately followed by the mass shooting in Las Vegas that remains a mystery.

What in the world is going on?

In answering a question about signs indicating the end times, GotQuestions.org writes, "An increase in false messiahs, an increase in warfare, and **increases in famines, plagues, and natural disasters**—these are signs of the end times. In [Matthew 24:5-8], though, we are given a warning: we are not to be deceived, because these events are only the beginning of birth pains; the end is still to come." (emphasis mine)

Paul writes this to Timothy about the end times:

You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. **They will be cruel and hate what is good.** They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that! (2 Timothy 3:3-5, emphasis mine)



This sure sounds like 2017, doesn't it? The subjects of cruelty and hate are front-page news stories, whether we're learning of new beheadings or accusations of new hate groups. Recently, CNN published the Southern Poverty Law Center's "hate map," which lumps together true hate-fueled organizations with Christian ministries holding to historic biblical orthodoxy. I follow this story because two years ago, SPLC put Probe Ministries on their hate map for being "anti-LGBT." And since I am the one who writes most of the content for Probe.org on sexuality and gender issues, they were mainly pointing their finger at me.

So while some people were wondering if the hurricanes had washed away the hate, I found myself writing a number of answers to email and social media posts assuring people that no, Probe is not a hate group, and inviting them—as I always have—to identify any words of hatred on our website. No one has ever shown me any hateful words. (I don't think we've ever written any hateful words to begin with, but I have always vetted anything I've written on the subject of LGBT by first submitting it to friends who used to identify as gay or lesbian.) But simply writing about homosexuality as not God's design, and the truth that Jesus Christ changes people and sometimes that includes people's same-sex attractions, is purportedly potential fuel for those who would commit violence against LGBT people.

(What's interesting is that an armed man used the SPLC hate map to attempt to commit violence against the Family Research Council as retribution for their inclusion on the hate list. The SPLC doesn't seem to have a problem with that.)

As my pastor says, "Truth sounds like hate to those who hate the truth." There are so many cultural lies about God's design for sex and identity that when we proclaim God's truth in a culture that embraces lies, we get called hateful and discriminatory.

No, the hurricanes did not wash away the hate; they just distracted us for a time, I think. I do believe we are seeing the birth pangs of the end times, and the world is going to continue to get darker and more hostile to those holding a biblical worldview. My prayer is that we will be faithful to stand for what is right and true no matter the cost.

Even when we're slimed with false accusations of hate.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/did\\_the\\_hurricanes\\_wash\\_away\\_the\\_hate](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/did_the_hurricanes_wash_away_the_hate) on October 3, 2017.

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## The Eclipse Declares the Glory of God



“The heavens declare the glory of God,” Psalm 19 tells us. On August 21, 2017, 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 Oregon to

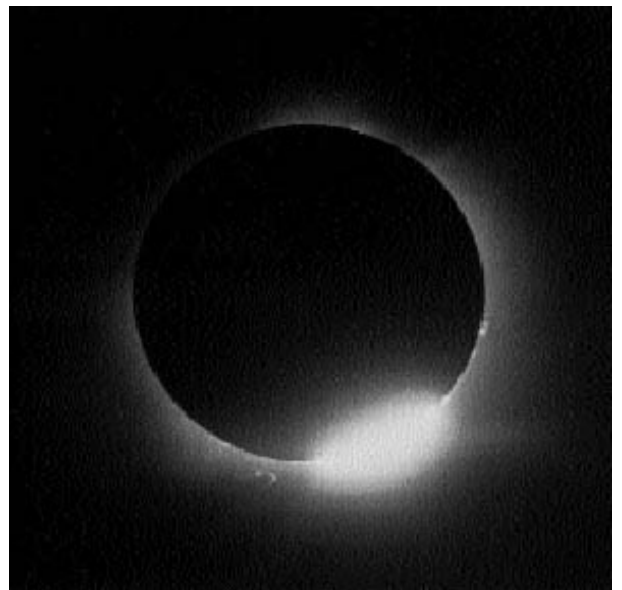
South Carolina, observers on the ground will see the moon slip in front of the sun, blocking out all its light and dropping the temperature drastically (about 10 to 15 degrees

Fahrenheit) and suddenly.

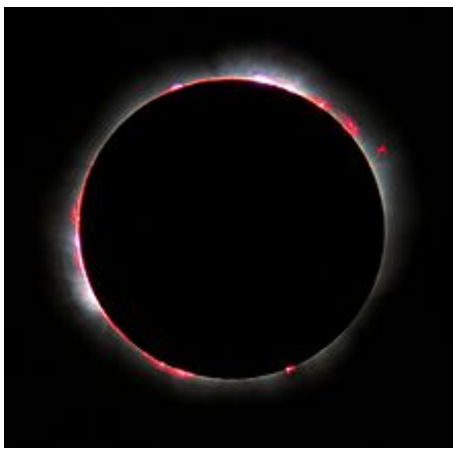
The glory of God isn't just seen, it's *felt* as well. Eclipse-chasers, and even those who have only experienced one total eclipse, report that at the moment of totality (when the moon completely covers the sun, plunging the land into an eerie darkness), people break out with yells and shouts and applause. 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" [read: declaring the glory of God!] 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 writes in Astronomy Magazine blog, [{2}](#)

*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.*

Whether you are fortunate enough to be in the path of the total eclipse, or like me 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!

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<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>

2. Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2004).

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# Keeping A Gratitude Journal

Some years ago Dr. Billy Graham was a guest on Oprah. I will never forget his answer to her question, "What are you most thankful for?"

He said, "Salvation given to us in Jesus Christ . . . and the way you have made people all over this country aware of the power of being grateful."

I loved that he took advantage of the platform to share the core of the gospel message, but also that he honored Oprah for making a difference in the culture by stressing gratitude the way she has. Millions of people have discovered the power of keeping a gratitude journal because of Oprah's testimony of how it impacted her life.

There's a difference between a grateful thought popping into our heads, even if we turn it into a prayer of gratitude, and the intentionality and physicality of daily writing down three things from that day for which we are grateful. There's something about writing with pen and ink on paper that carves the thoughts into our brains. (See my blog post [Pen > 'Puter](#))

There's also something about recording our gratitude that changes the way we think. We become more aware of the ways in which God blesses us with what I call His "hugs and kisses" throughout the day. Instead of taking for granted the fact that the traffic lights were all synced up to allow us to sail through green lights all the way to our destination, we say, "Oh, thank You, Lord!" light after light, our sense of wonder and appreciation enlarging with each intersection. When the rain starts literally the second after we climb into the car and slam the door shut, we say, "Oh Lord!! Bless You!" instead of saying, "Wow, that was lucky." When we wake up in the morning and realize we didn't have to get up and use the restroom, we see it as the blessing and gift that it is rather

than taking it for granted.

I always suggest keeping a gratitude journal for those battling depression. If they are especially depressed, I suggest writing down ten things instead of three or five. When we are deep in the weeds of despair and hopelessness, it's easy to believe the lie that nobody cares, including God. But even those immersed in the mire of darkness can still find things to be grateful for: any body part that works, any body part that doesn't hurt, heating or air conditioning, a bed to sleep in, access to clean water to drink and bathe in, being surrounded by people who speak the same language, internet access, a car, family members who still love them, a job, their memory, the ability to read . . . the list goes on and on, if they will pay attention. (Let me take a moment to point you to an excellent article on Bible.org by my dear friend Ann Golding: "[Helping a Friend Through the Darkness of Depression.](#)")

Several years ago, Ann Voskamp taught more millions of people to keep a gratitude journal in her book *One Thousand Gifts*. She explained that everything that God allows to happen to us is filtered through His love and grace, so even if it's horrible and painful, it is transformed into a gift for which we can say "Thank You."

One of my pastors regularly posts to Instagram a picture of the gifts he's grateful for, hashtagged with a number. Having started at #1000, he's at #538 today. Not surprisingly, JP [@jpokluda] is one of the most joy-filled people you'll ever meet. He lives immersed in always-conscious gratitude that overflows into joy.

It would be reasonable for you to wonder about MY gratitude journal, right?

Well, I kept one many years ago when I first learned about God's command to give thanks not only IN everything, (1



Thessalonians 5:18) but FOR everything (Ephesians 5:20). And an interesting thing happened: developing and maintaining an attitude of gratitude become a way of life for me, like breathing. Recently I realized that my “thank Yous” outnumber my “please” prayers by about a 9-to-1 margin. I guess the discipline of keeping a gratitude journal became a part of who I am.

And I’m good with that. :::smile:::

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[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/keeping\\_a\\_gratitude\\_journal](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/keeping_a_gratitude_journal)  
on June 27, 2017.

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## Free Indeed!

Recently I had the privilege of speaking in a women’s prison. I shared my story which I call, “[How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can’t Change](#).” (How’s that for a topic of interest for incarcerated people?)



But then I was able to speak briefly about what we have in common, a situational loss of freedom. I have lost the ability—the freedom—to walk, and they have temporarily lost the ability—the freedom—to walk out of lockup. Still, even while imprisoned by our situations, Jesus offers *true freedom*

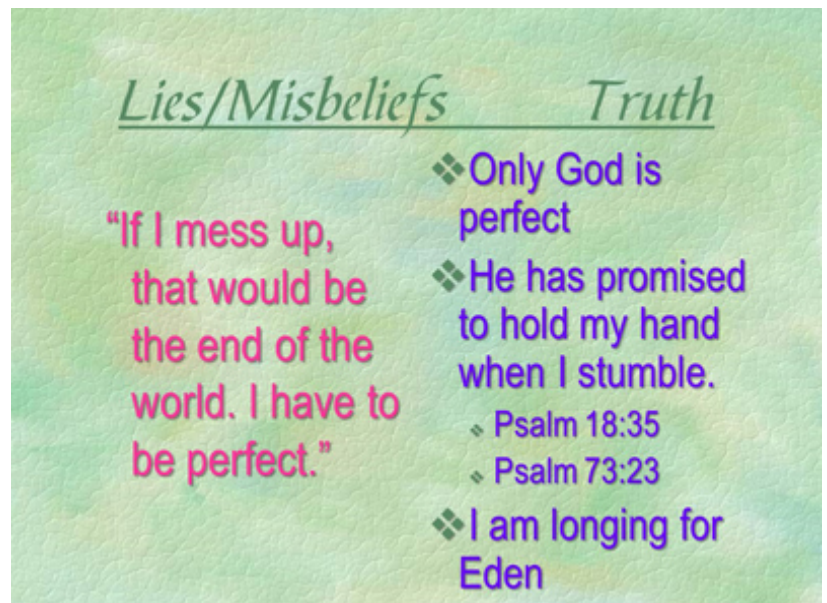
that has nothing to do with our circumstances. He promised to His disciples, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” He even said, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:32, 36)

So what does THAT mean?

What was so crazy great about this opportunity to speak to and hug and love on the precious ladies in the women’s prison, was that the previous weekend I had given four messages on freedom at a women’s retreat at sea. (You can listen to the recordings [here](#), if you like.) So many facets of freedom were already rolling around in my head as I thought about Jesus’ offer of freedom to women in prison.

- As we look at our past, Jesus can set us free from guilt when we confess our sins and receive His forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9). He can set us free from shame, that feeling of not just *making* a mistake, but *being* a mistake, when we receive His gift of honor as He showers pleasure and acceptance on us.

• As we look at our present, Jesus can set us free from the “tapes” of lies and misbeliefs that control our lives, as we replace the lies with His truths. For example, a number of the ladies at the retreat had lived in bondage to the lie that



they had to be perfect in order to be acceptable. The weight of needing to be perfect is soul-killing because it's impossible for imperfect people to be perfect! But we can be set free by embracing the truth that only God is perfect, so we can let go of the unrealistic expectation that we can ever live perfectly this side of heaven. God knows we will stumble, and He has promised to hold our hand when we do. And beyond that, He understands our longing for perfection is actually a longing for the perfect home of Eden, which we will get to experience on the New Earth we read about in the book of Revelation.

• We can walk in the breathtaking freedom from the soul-crushing imprisonment of unforgiveness by forgiving those who have hurt or offended us. The weight of others' sins against us is bad enough, but Jesus said that if we refuse to forgive, we will be subject to tormentors—demonic torturers (Matthew 18:34-35). When we release our offenders over to Jesus for Him to deal with, we are set free—free indeed!

• As we think about the future, there is glorious freedom when we trust God instead of being controlled by fear. So often, we are in bondage to fear because we want to be in control. We forget that we are not God, wanting to manage not only our own lives but the lives of others. There is freedom in trusting

God instead of trying to control others.

- Proverbs 29:25 assures us that fear of man is a snare. This isn't talking about being afraid of people like some are afraid of heights, or the dark, or spiders. Fear of man is about working for other people's approval and fearing their disapproval. When we look to Jesus, though, we see how He modelled living for "an audience of One," caring only about pleasing His Father (John 8:29). When we follow Christ's example, living to please the Father instead of fickle people, there is freedom! I can personally attest to this. Because of my stubborn attachment to a biblical sexual ethic, I have been slimed online by people who despise God's standards. The slime slides off, though, when I keep my focus on the Lord and, like Jesus in Hebrews 12:2, I can "despise the shame" by refusing to accept it. That's what freedom feels like!

- There is true freedom in accepting God's choices for our lives: personality and temperament, introversion or extroversion, health limitations, even capacity. (Some people naturally have a "gallon" energy tank, while others naturally have a cup.) Resenting and fighting God's choices—even gender!—leads to expending mental and emotional energy that is restricting and costly. But embracing God's right to make these decisions for our design and our lives, laying down our non-existent "right" to define ourselves the way WE want, brings us freedom.

<u>Lies/Misbeliefs</u>	<u>Truth</u>
<p>"My parents' problems were my fault."</p> <p>"I am responsible for my parents (or my children's) happiness."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ I don't have that kind of power.</li> <li>❖ Each one bears his own load – Gal 6:5</li> <li>❖ Each one is responsible for his own choices – Ezek. 18</li> </ul>

- One of my dear friends discovered, in the process of working through the challenges of parenting a prodigal adult child, that there is freedom in owning 100% of our own part and 0% of other people's choices and behaviors. There's no point in taking on

guilt or responsibility for someone else's choices; they are completely responsible for their part.

- And finally (though definitely not exhaustively), we are free to choose our attitudes. We can decide to either live in bondage to an attitude of entitlement or a continual expectation of the negative, or live in freedom by developing an attitude of gratitude. I love Dr. Charles Swindoll's poem on Attitude:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude  
on life.

Attitude, to me, is more important than facts.

It is more important than the past,  
than education, than money,  
than circumstances, than failure, than successes,  
than what other people think or say or do.

It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill.  
It will make or break a company . . . a church . . . a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice  
everyday regarding the attitude  
we will embrace for that day.

We cannot change our past . . .  
we cannot change the fact that people  
will act in a certain way.

We cannot change the inevitable.

The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have,  
and that is our attitude.

I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me  
and 90% of how I react to it.

And so it is with you . . . we are in charge of our Attitudes.

It's possible to be "free indeed." Regardless of your  
circumstances. Choose the freedom Jesus offers!

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/free\\_indeed](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/free_indeed) on July 25,  
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# The Great Pains of Perfectionism

Some wag has said that a perfectionist is someone who takes  
great pains . . . and gives them to others.

Once I asked my Facebook friends for examples of perfectionism  
and controlling behavior. Ohboyohboy, is that ever a problem!  
I've never had so many responses to a question! Here are just  
a few (and you can tell that there is a specific person  
attached to every example):

- Doing all the household chores because that way they  
will be done *right*. Then feeling resentful because no  
one ever offers to help and here she is, doing all the  
work herself.
- Reading Every. Single. Greeting card. To make sure they  
picked the perfect one.

- Rearranging the dishes in the dishwasher to her standards.
- Correcting details in your spouse's stories.
- Laying out your children's clothes every day. Making their beds. Cleaning their rooms. Not letting them learn how to do anything for themselves because it won't be perfect like you do it.
- People who drive in the fastest lane and go exactly the speed limit, trying to control others' behavior.
- Telling a child they can't eat egg "on the toast," you must take one bite of egg, then one bite of toast.
- Staying up all night to clean for a party because someone might see one speck of dirt, or one thing out of place (as if someone is going to look in every corner of your house).
- After my mother vacuumed the living room floor, if she found footprints in the carpet, she lined us up and measured our feet to the prints. The culprit was made to bear the shame of messing up her hard work and had to re-vacuum the floor.
- If unhappy with your wife's figure, as she eats things you disapprove of, you actually remove it from her hands and throw it in the trash.
- The table top is dirty. If you don't use a tablecloth or placemats, you are scum and she won't eat your food. One time I stacked the placemats the wrong way (one on top of another instead of folding them to the inside and stacking them, so that the table dirt doesn't spoil them), and they all had to be washed. One time I unknowingly put clean laundry in the dirty laundry basket and it all had to be re-washed. She washed all kitchen knives, poured boiling water over them and baked them in the oven!

At the core of a controlling person is fear. "I am not okay and I'm going to be exposed as not okay." That fear makes them feel that life is outside of their control, so they have to

manipulate other people and situations to get control back. I learned this when I was trying to control my high school son who kept making choices I didn't approve of, and I tried to pull in a third person to do SOMETHING to make him do what I wanted. That third person, who became one of my mentors, refused to be triangulated into the situation, and explained how my controlling behavior showed my panic at not being in control, and was a pathetic attempt to get it back. But since control has always been an illusion (like driving on ice!), it didn't work.

That's when I moved from control freak to *recovering* control freak.

The perfectionist's life purpose is the pursuit of the impossible, the ideal, the perfect-and the absence of pain. Usually this pursuit is at the expense of relationships. It's really hard to be in relationship with someone with unattainable standards!

The longing for perfection is understandable. We lost it when Adam and Eve were kicked out of Eden (Genesis 3), and we've been longing for it ever since. When we are reconciled to God by trusting in His Son, we can look forward to living in Eden again, literally heaven on earth (Revelation 21). But it isn't going to happen this side of eternity.

Perfectionists have the right longing, but the wrong time frame. They need to be patient for the perfection of the new heavens and the new earth. Controlling people need to let go of the illusion that they can control anyone other than themselves, and anything other than their own attitudes and perspectives.

Both of them (us!) need to stop taking great pains . . . and giving them to others.



This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/the-great-pains-of-perfectionism/](https://blogs.bible.org/the-great-pains-of-perfectionism/) on June 13, 2017.

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## Remodeling a Home—and a Soul



We are in the midst of a major remodeling project in our home as it is made wheelchair-friendly. Doors are being widened, our closet is being reconfigured so I can reach my hanging clothes, and our bathroom's tub and step-in shower are being replaced by a roll-in shower.

I have been struck by the similarities between remodeling a home and remodeling a soul—otherwise known as the sanctification process. Sanctification means “being made holy,” and holy means set apart. I am being set apart for God's kingdom, for His purposes, and with a plan to make me into the image of His own dear Son (Romans 8:29).

The first thing that happened was that things got moved. Our bed was moved to an enclosed porch, which is a great blessing given the amount of construction dust in our bedroom. Our hanging clothes got moved to rented racks in our dining room, along with all the suitcases and other kinds of things on

shelves. (It pretty much looks like a bomb went off in our home!)

When God is remodeling our soul, He also moves things, particularly moving us out of our comfort zone. We get moved into a *discomfort* zone—a change zone, a growth zone. In this part of the process, we can find out how easy it is to make idols of comfort and the status quo. And like all other challenges and trials, the answer to the test is to trust God and rely on Him.

Before making any changes, the project director went up in the attic to check the load-bearing walls. I was so glad to learn this; it meant that nothing would be torn down and taken out that would weaken our home and make it unstable.

When God is doing the remodeling, He takes into account how we were designed and built (by Himself!). He knows how much stress we can take, and won't violate His own design for us. Just as He promises us not to allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able (1 Cor 10:13), He always remembers that we are but dust (Psalm 103:14), and He knows our limits.

The trim around doors was pulled out, and sections of sheet rock were cut out and removed. The garden tub was cut up and hauled away, and the huge mirror over it is now gone. The glass shower was taken out.

I've noticed that part of the sanctification process means God removes the old things in our hearts that have outlived their usefulness—things like coping strategies and childish ways of thinking and living. In order to grow us up to maturity, the old has to go.

They parked a trailer outside our back door, and it was soon filled with sheet rock, wood, marble and glass that needed to be taken to the city dump because it was trash. I mentioned this to the man in charge, who cheerfully agreed that "You gotta get rid of the ugly!" Since I also shared with him my

thoughts about the parallel to sanctification, he laughed with me that that's what God does: He gets rid of our ugly. He targets anything that's not glorifying to Himself or helpful to us, and pulls it out. Or calls us to let it go into His hands.

I noticed there is a definite order to things. The open spaces for closets and bathrooms were widened before installing new doors. The walls were textured before being painted. The bathtub was pulled out, and its faucet and spigot were removed, before the tiler comes to give us a beautiful new wall.

This made me realize that God knows the best order for addressing issues in our lives that need to be changed. Like knowing which are the load-bearing walls, He knows what needs to wait until He deals with other problems first. For example, we often want Him to get rid of nasty habits or addictions, but He's more interested in working on our hearts so that the change in our behaviors is a more (super)natural, organic result of growth.

Remodeling a house means a lot of inconvenience. I have to go to a gym that has a roll-in shower because our other shower is in a bathtub, and I can't climb in and out of bathtubs anymore. We are having trouble finding some things that were moved temporarily. There is dust everywhere. I can't have people over very easily. These are all temporary, but they are still inconvenient.

God's remodeling process also feels inconvenient because there are so many adjustments to new ways of thinking and reacting and living. We have to practice new ways of thinking when God makes changes in our belief system and our trust system. Adjustment means change, and change is rarely convenient!

The owner of a construction company that does these remodeling jobs for mobility-challenged people like me has a picture in

his mind of what all these changes will look like in the end. I have a vague idea of what changing the entrance to our bedroom will look like, and how the reconfigured closet will work, and what it will be like to roll into the shower, but he has a very specific plan in mind based on experience and knowledge and wisdom.

My heavenly Father has a very specific plan for my remodeling too. He knows what making me over into the image of His Son means, so I will look like Sue and Jesus both.

And just as I need to trust the architect of our home remodel, even more I need to trust my Father, who knows what He's doing in remodeling my soul and does it all well . . . and in love.

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/remodeling\\_a\\_home-and\\_a\\_soul](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/remodeling_a_home-and_a_soul)  
on May 2, 2017.

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## **How to Ensure Your Kid Won't Walk Away From the Faith After Graduation**

That title sounds like clickbait, doesn't it? What parent doesn't want to make sure their not-ready-for-prime-time young adult will continue to walk with the Lord, honoring Him with their life, and making wise, biblically-based decisions? Wouldn't it be great if such a 5-point guaranteed method existed?

Too bad. It's doesn't. Life isn't like that. We can't control other people like that.

But I can make some suggestions that have made a difference in other families.

1. PRAY. And never stop. Our children are the targets of spiritual warfare. They are hated by the enemy of our souls who hates God, hates His people, and wants to destroy our children.

2. From the time they are itty-bitty, play "Spot the Lie." Pay attention to the lies of the world, the flesh and the devil ([1 John 2:16](#)), and talk about them with your children when you're sitting at home, when you're walking and driving, when you're putting them to bed, and when they get up in the morning ([Deuteronomy 6:7](#)). For example, one day when my now-grown children were in elementary school, the car radio played Bette Midler's song "From a Distance," which says that God is watching us from a distance. I asked, "Is that true?" My sons thought about it and said, "No! He's right here with us!" Exactly. We spotted the lie. And called it what it was.

3. Educate yourself about how to answer the Big Questions of Life so you can talk to your kids about them: How do we know there is a God? How do we know we can trust the Bible? How do we know Jesus is God? Why does a good God allow pain and evil and suffering?

What makes kids walk away from the faith is usually having unanswered questions. They might not ask for fear of a lame answer, or they might deduce that they shouldn't doubt, shouldn't question the things we teach them, and they should "just have faith." Well, here's the thing: we should trust our lives and our eternities to Christ not because of warm fuzzy feelings, but *because Christianity is true!* Do you know WHY it's true?

Let me recommend a couple of new books, written by moms to equip other parents to be confident in their own faith so they can effectively teach it to their kids.

[Keeping Your Kids on God's Side: 40 Conversations to Help Them Build a Lasting Faith](#) by Natasha Crain is super accessible and understandable. One of the best apologetics books I've seen.

[Teaching Others to Defend Christianity](#) by Cathryn Buse is written by a former NASA engineer (now a stay-at-home mom of littles) who uses her "mad logic skillz" to walk the reader through the basic Big Questions of Life in an organized way.

One other resource: a few months ago I was asked to speak to a group of moms on "Apologetics for Parents of Littles." You can [download the recording here](#) and [get the handout here](#).

4. Talk to your kids about these big questions of the Christian life: about God, the Bible, Jesus, pain and suffering. Ask them what they think and how they're working through these very important issues. Talk about these things *before* they leave your nest after high school!

5. One final suggestion: send your kid(s) to Probe Ministries' Mind Games camp, a one-week total immersion in worldview and apologetics, both classic apologetics (those Big Questions of Life) and cultural apologetics, such as Grace and Truth About LGBT, Genetic Engineering, The Differences Between Guys and Girls, How to Watch a Movie, Christian Views of Science and Earth History, and more. It's a faith-builder and question-answerer, with lots of free time for fun and connecting with other campers. For many of the campers, it deeply impacts their hearts and souls, nailing down the glorious fact that Christianity is TRUE! My husband I have been privileged to pour into high school and college students through Mind Games for over 20 years; it is truly our joy! This year it's June 11-17 at Camp Copass in Denton, Texas. Check out the videos and lots of information at [probe.org/mindgames](http://probe.org/mindgames).

I am deeply grateful to my friend Dr. Kathy Koch for allowing me to guest blog for her. This post was originally published at [drkathykoch.com/faith-graduation/](http://drkathykoch.com/faith-graduation/) on May 22, 2017.

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# What's Your Superpower?

If you could choose a superpower, which one would it be? When asked this question as an icebreaker, I've heard some people say they'd love to fly; others say they would choose mindreading. Some would love to be invisible.

But for the believer in Jesus, the idea of having superpowers isn't a fantasy.

It is the *reality* of being indwelt by God Himself, the source of actual and real supernatural power. And He gives gifts, spiritual gifts, that consist of supernatural enabling. We find the spiritual gifts in four places in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4.

Consider these spiritual gifts—superpowers, if you will—given by the Holy Spirit to allow His people to minister to others:

**Teaching** – The supernatural ability to explain clearly and apply effectively the truth of the Word of God.

**Pastor/Teacher** – One who is supernaturally equipped to shepherd and feed the flock of God with the result of their growth and maturity.

**Evangelism** – The supernatural capacity to present the gospel message with exceptional clarity and an overwhelming burden for those who don't know Christ.

**Word of Knowledge** – The supernatural ability to receive information and truth directly from God without natural means. To know without knowing how you know.

**Word of Wisdom** – The supernatural ability to have insight concerning God's perspective and relay this insight succinctly to others. "Deep insight with handles."

**Faith** – The supernatural ability to believe God for the impossible.

**Exhortation (Encouragement)** – The supernatural ability to come alongside and help others by comforting, encouraging, challenging, and rebuking.

**Showing Mercy** – The supernatural ability to minister compassionately and cheerfully to those who are difficult to minister to.

**Giving** – The supernatural ability to give of one's material goods to the work of the Lord consistently, generously, sacrificially, with wisdom and cheerfulness.

**Leadership/Administration** – The supernatural ability to organize and lead projects while handling people tactfully and providing the vision to keep them at the task.

**Service** – The supernatural ability to serve faithfully and joyfully behind the scenes, in practical ways, in long-term commitments to service.

**Helps** – The supernatural ability to minister joyfully to God's people in short-term service with flexibility and sensitivity to what needs to be done.



**Discernment of Spirits** – A supernatural ability to distinguish between the spirit of truth and spirit of error, between holiness and evil. Can instantly sniff out when someone's a phony or lying.

My husband and I created a list of diagnostic questions to help people find their superpowers, which you can find here: [www.probe.org/how-do-you-determine-your-spiritual-gift/](http://www.probe.org/how-do-you-determine-your-spiritual-gift/)

Flying and mind-reading aren't on our list, but you might find your superpower here!

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/whats\\_your\\_superpower](http://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/whats_your_superpower) on Apr. 4, 2017.