

# Giving Thanks for EVERYTHING?

Early in my walk with Christ, I learned the life-changing, perspective-changing discipline of giving thanks for everything. EVERYTHING.

Initially, I stumbled over Ephesians 5:20, “always giving thanks for everything,” thinking that surely that must not be an accurate translation, or there was a footnote or asterisk or *something* that would mitigate the implication of the absolutes of “always” and “everything.” I even bought a Greek-English interlinear New Testament so I could check out the original language.

Yep, that’s what it says.

But it’s awfully hard to embrace this command without an understanding of why God would tell us to give thanks always, much less why this command, like all the others, was given “[so it may go well with](#)” us.

It starts with the reassuring truth that *a good and loving God is in control* of everything that touches our lives. His sovereignty cloaks and protects us like spiritual bubble wrap; whatever makes it through the layers of His protective love and purpose has been given express permission to touch us. It means God has a plan that includes the good and the painful things that enter our lives. It means that He is able to make all things work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Apparently, God thinks that giving thanks is important, since He directs us to do it several times.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything with prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ

Jesus.” Phil 4:6-7

I love that God wants us to bring everything to Him instead of being anxious. I love that God knows the value and importance of thanksgiving to help us stay balanced, so He tells us to weave thanksgiving into all of our communication with Him (the first, general word “prayer”) and all our supplication (asking for what we need), as we make our requests known to Him (telling Him what we’re asking).

“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; *in everything give thanks*, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thess 5:16-18

For all the books, CDs and pulpit messages out there on finding God’s will for our lives, there’s nothing like starting with the passages that spell it out plainly! God’s will for us is to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything. Pretty much covers everything, all the time! Giving thanks isn’t just a good idea: it’s God’s will for our lives.

“Understand what the Lord’s will is. . . *always giving thanks for all things* in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” Eph 5:17-20

This is the passage that first challenged me to bring my thinking into alignment with God’s word, a passage that spells out His will: not just giving thanks *IN* all things, but giving thanks *FOR* all things. And of course we can’t do it with our fleshly, fallen feelings and we can’t do it in our own strength, which is why this command is followed by the directive, “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.” We can do things in Jesus’ name and in Jesus’ strength that we cannot do on our own. But when we step forward in obedience despite our feelings, He meets us there with His more-than-sufficient grace and enabling!

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed

you were called in one body; and *be thankful.*" Col 3:15

I love this verse. Letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts means letting it be an umpire, calling out "Safe!" or "Out!" For years I have counseled friends, "Let God's peace be your umpire. Follow the peace, and go wherever it leads you." Choosing to be thankful (note that it doesn't say *feel* thankful, just *be* thankful. Give thanks regardless of your feelings!) is like getting a fluoride treatment at the dentist: it lays a protective layer over the peace, the way the fluoride is a protective layer over your teeth. I love that although Paul's directive is to the whole church at Corinth, it can and should be implemented on an individual basis as well. So when we give thanks in our faith communities, we help seal the peace in the body of Christ, and our thankful hearts also help keep our own personal peace quotients high. Talk about a win-win situation!

But why is it so important to give thanks? I had a lightbulb moment when reading Romans 1 and saw the incredibly important role of giving thanks in protecting ourselves from spiraling down into a really bad place:

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-His eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

"For although they knew God, they never glorified Him as God ***nor gave thanks to Him***, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to

look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.” (Rom 1:18-23, emphasis mine)

Giving glory and thanks to God is a *spiritual retaining wall* that keeps us from descending to the next level, where our thinking becomes futile and our foolish hearts become darkened. And after this point, a downward spiral into depravity is inevitable.

So giving thanks as an ongoing self-discipline is a protection for us! But far more than that—it helps keep us in a healthy relationship to God. The warning from Romans 1 is that people who knew God but refused to give thanks to Him were refusing to embrace His sovereignty. There is an ugly spirit of rebellion in rejecting God’s right to be God!

When we give thanks for everything that God allows into our lives, we are saying, “I acknowledge that You are God and I am not, and You know what You’re doing. Even if I don’t like this thing You have allowed to touch me, I trust You to make it turn out okay in the end.” I think that kind of trust is pleasing to the Lord. And my own experience is that getting (and staying) in the habit of giving thanks for everything keeps our hearts tender toward Him.

For an example of this, three years ago I blogged about this in “[Giving Thanks in a Hard Place](#).” And my story of learning to give thanks for a lifelong disability is [here](#). Where can you start giving thanks for what God has allowed to touch YOUR life?

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# What is the “Authentic Self”?

The concept of the “authentic self” is a wonderful-sounding, important element of politically-correct thinking. Especially if one’s “authentic self” includes a deviation from standard sexuality. Many people are proud of themselves for being progressive in encouraging others to admit and embrace inclinations and desires that a few decades ago were considered shameful.

Oprah was a major proponent of the idea. On her television show and her magazine, she encouraged her faithful followers to be open and real about their true thoughts and feelings, desires and dreams, passions and embarrassments. She was (and continues to be) especially insistent on the importance of coming out as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender) if someone had even the faintest leanings in that direction.

In today’s culture, coming out and admitting you’re gay is applauded as “being authentic.” Claiming you are a man trapped in a woman’s body, or vice versa, is “being authentic.” But refusing to accept such labels means you’re inauthentic.

I remember when Oprah interviewed Ted Haggard, disgraced former pastor and head of the National Association of Evangelicals. He said he was a heterosexual man with temptations toward homosexuality (that he regretted giving into), which is consistent with a biblical worldview. Oprah would have none of it. She pronounced him gay and declared with authority, “That is who you are!” It was clear she wanted him to embrace what she considered his “authentic self” and stop denying himself.

It made me think . . . what if a new movement rose up attempting to normalize obesity, calling it “a different kind of beautiful”? And what if obese people came on her show and said, “Oprah, girlfriend, you’ve had a lifelong inclination to

overeat and not exercise. Face it! You are a fat girl! That is who you are! Stop lying about it and embrace it as who you truly are!” She wouldn’t like it because she knows some weaknesses are worthy of struggling against. She wouldn’t like it because she doesn’t want her temptations and her inclinations to define her.

Because temptations and inclinations can be wrong.

When politician John Edwards had an adulterous relationship with Rielle Hunter while his wife battled cancer, Oprah booked her on the show. It was quite intriguing to me to see how Oprah refused to approve of Ms. Hunter’s choices.

**Oprah:** When this is all said and done and we look back on this time of you, Rielle Hunter, the mistress and all of that, what is it you want people to really understand about what has happened here?



**Rielle:** All of their feelings that they’re feeling and hatred that’s directed toward me has to do with their fears or their anger and disappointment and sadness about their mother cheating on their father or their father or their husband or their spouse. It has to do with them, and it doesn’t have to do with me, because they don’t know me.

**Oprah:** Why can’t it just be that they think that it’s wrong?

Oprah did not appreciate a woman sleeping with another woman’s husband. That’s wrong. But if a married woman comes to the conclusion that she’s a lesbian, then sleeping with another woman is embracing her “authentic self.”

This is not the first time we’ve seen this in human history. The book of Judges tells the unhappy story, over and over, of

the nation of Israel stumbling into one disaster after another that required rescue because “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

When we do what is right in our own eyes, it never [goes well with us](#). That’s because we are fallen, broken people who live in a fallen, broken world, and we desperately need divine help and re-direction. We can’t trust our hearts to tell us who we really are, who is our “authentic self,” because God declares that the human heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

The problem with what the world calls our “authentic self” is that it is the sum of our broken thoughts, feelings, desires, insecurities, and dreams. The “authentic self” that the world urges us to embrace is what the Bible calls the flesh, the part of us that operates independently from God and needs to be crucified, not glamorized (Galatians 5:24). In fact, Jesus had a completely opposite call for us: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mark 8:34).

When we DO deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit transforms us so we look more and more like Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18). Thinking biblically, the true and authentic self is the one that will last into eternity. A hundred years from today, every Christ-follower will be free from flesh, free from the old rotten self, reveling in the freedom and joy that comes from being completely holy and righteous and true to our re-created self that looks and acts and thinks like Jesus but with the “flavor” of our redeemed individual personalities and temperaments.

Jeanette Howard, author of *Out of Egypt*, explaining her journey out of lesbianism, recently wrote, “I am tired of people claiming that they need to be ‘true to themselves.’ No they don’t. They, like all believers, need to die to themselves and be true to God. That is authentic

discipleship.”

More and more Christians are throwing in the towel in their fight against unholy sexual and relational temptations, claiming to follow their “authentic self.” Even worse, a growing number of churches are doing something similar by embracing same-sex marriage. I have a question for them. If God really created them to be gay and blesses that identity today, what will happen a hundred years from today? Will there be homosexuality in heaven? There will be no sex in heaven because the only marriage will be between the Church and the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. If one’s identity is wrapped up in same-sex attractions, as it is by those claiming to be “gay Christians,” who will they be when all sexual and relational brokenness is a thing of the past, a mere memory of earthly life?

I suggest that a believer’s true and real and lasting “authentic self” is all wrapped up in not who we say we are, but who God says we are: His beloved child, redeemed and purified and made holy as He is holy. Chosen, accepted, and included, a citizen of heaven and a member of God’s household. Belonging to Jesus because He bought us with His very lifeblood. Sealed with the Spirit, made brand new from the inside out.

Now *that’s* an “authentic self” I can get excited about!

This blog post originally appeared on April 7, 2015, at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/what\\_is\\_the\\_authentic\\_self](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_is_the_authentic_self)

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# When Life Hands You Bananas .

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My friend Jonathan Baker handed a banana and a knife to every student in his Bible classes at Puebla Christian School in Puebla, Mexico. He told them to cut up their bananas any way they wanted. Junior high boys pretty much decimated theirs while other students cut their bananas into large pieces.

Then Jonathan passed out cellophane tape and told them to put the bananas back together again. It was, of course, a mess. The students who had made neat cuts with their knives were able to reassemble their bananas, but even with tape it was clear they were in parts. The mashed bananas, needless to say, were hopeless. Even with tape.

Jonathan made the observation that our choices have consequences, and we can't ever go back to the way it was before we made our choices. No amount of tape can possibly make a banana whole again. We can certainly make a mess of our lives when we make bad choices and have to live with the consequences.

We cannot fix our bananas.

We cannot undo the damage we inflict on our bananas.

It's sad.

But then he went into the next room and brought out ice cream, chocolate syrup, nuts, whipped cream, cherries, bowls and spoons. With a smile, Jonathan said, "You can't do anything with cut up, mashed up bananas, but God can! He can make a banana split! He can take broken pieces of our lives, unfixable messes and painful consequences of bad choices, and make something sweet from them. He'll make something unimaginably more wonderful of our broken pieces—IF we'll let

Him.”

I love that story. And I love how it hit the students’ hearts with hope.

But there is another layer to my enjoyment of this story. Jonathan shared it with me in Puebla, where my husband and I are here for a week to teach some of Probe Ministries’ [Mind Games](#) material at the school. We also spoke at a weekend conference where I shared “[How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can’t Change](#),” my story of living with polio my whole life. (I was six months old when I contracted it, just a few months before the vaccine was developed.)

I learned that here in Mexico, as in many countries around the world, Americans are often dismissed as lightweights because surely we don’t know anything about suffering. But when my audience could see me limp painfully and slowly to the podium, leaning on my cane, I had instant credibility. I could see it on their faces: *I guess she really does know something about suffering.*

The power of my message, that a good and loving God is in control so we can trust Him, has nothing to do with me and everything to do with God’s grace. But first, my audience had to be open to receiving what I had to say. And once again, I saw how polio is God’s good gift to me, to open the doors of people’s hearts to hear what I have to say, so that it blesses them and honors God.

The banana of my broken body is being used for a spiritual banana split. And that is a sweet, sweet blessing. With a cherry on top!

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# How Should We Think About Texas' First Same Sex Wedding?

*Last week saw a front-page story of Texas' first gay marriage. I asked my friend Hope Harris to guest blog for me, responding to this event out of her decades of experience and perspective as a former gay activist before Jesus changed everything in her life.*

For well over 25 years I lived openly as a lesbian, advocating for gay rights and Marriage Equality. Just over six years ago I trusted Christ, and since then I have wrestled in depth with resolving my faith and sexuality, gender roles and Marriage Equality. Because of my belief that God's Word is true, I have landed on the side of the Biblical view of these issues. I can't even begin to express what a transformation God has made in me, that He would bring me to the place where I embrace the Biblical definition of marriage as between one man and one woman.

Last week, on February 19, 2015, Suzanne Bryant and Sarah Goodfriend became the first same sex couple to legally wed in the state of Texas. Shortly after the ceremony, the Texas Supreme Court responded with a stay, making it clear that this same sex marriage license is illegal and is not legally binding. This was a one-time marriage license granted by a probate judge based on the fact that one of the women is battling ovarian cancer, because it is possible that Ms. Goodfriend may not live to see same sex marriage legal in the state of Texas.

How should we think about this?

Let's start with the premise by which this couple was granted a marriage license. It is based on Ms. Goodfriend's cancer battle; there is limited information available as to what stage her cancer has progressed to. In its article "Women Wed in Texas"[\[1\]](#), the Dallas Morning News states,

*"Goodfriend, policy director for state Rep. Celia Israel, said during a news conference that her last chemotherapy treatment was 4 1/2 months ago. But, she added: "All of us wonder if the cancer grows back along with the hair growing back."*

I am sorry that Ms. Goodfriend is suffering from ovarian cancer and my prayers are with her for full restoration of health. Furthermore, this not a personal attack on Ms. Goodfriend or her partner Ms. Bryant.

From my experience as an advocate for Marriage Equality, I see this as a public appeal to gain sympathy for same sex couples in Texas. After all, who would deny a "dying woman" and her faithful partner of 31 years the right to make medical and legal decisions? On the surface this sounds like a valid reason to side with the couple—after all, this is a one-time exception.

First, the couple themselves are well educated individuals. Ms. Bryant is an attorney who graduated from Duke Law School. She specializes in second parent adoptions for alternative families, meaning same sex couples. Ms. Goodfriend holds a Ph.D. in Economics from UNC.

It is a fact these women are long term partners and based on their level of education and positions, it would be hard to believe that they have not long ago obtained medical power of attorney and given each other the legal right to make medical decision should the other not have the fortitude to do so. Additionally I am sure they have had the foresight to make funeral arrangements as well.

Let's look at another aspect of this situation that appeals to our sense of equality and justice.

Bryant said Thursday that being legally married to Goodfriend, who has ovarian cancer, would ensure inheritance. . . . "Financially, now we're intertwined, and we will have community property that we will share."

As mentioned above, the couple is well educated, and they have the ability—apart from marriage—to legally ensure that their joint property goes to the parties they intend it to, such as the remaining partner and their two adopted daughters. I see this as a ploy to gain the compassion and understanding of their fellow Texans for the larger agenda of granting all same sex couples the rights, responsibilities and portability now granted to heterosexual couples in the State of Texas.

What should our response be as Christ followers who want to uphold the Biblical definition of marriage?

It is crucial that we have each resolved that the Biblical definition is God's best plan for humanity. I can assure you that the battle is just gaining momentum in Texas. As it does it will also bring many heated and harsh exchanges between people on both sides of the issue, in public forums, town meetings, churches and personal conversations. Anger will be most intense towards those who stand on the side of Biblical marriage.

Understand that those advocating for Marriage Equality often view Christians as unkind, uneducated and intolerant. Because of this, I believe it is all the more necessary for God's people to become educated. Learn to effectively demonstrate a balance of love and truth. Become men and women who can exercise empathy and compassion without compromise to those with opposing views. Below are three common positions most often brought to the forefront of the Marriage Equality argument.

**Social Constructs Argument:** *Men and women are equal and able to effectively carry out the roles of the opposite gender in traditional marriages.*

Understand that gay marriage dilutes the value of marriage by insisting that there is nothing intrinsically essential about the balance of male and female. It will further weaken the family bonds that God ordained.

**Civil Rights Argument:** *Gay rights and same sex marriage are civil rights issues parallel to the 1960s civil rights movement.*

Same sex marriage is not a civil right, by definition; civil rights are based on socio-economic changes rather than emotional wants and physical attractions.

I have always found this position personally offensive to men and women of color who fought tirelessly to gain equal footing to their counterparts here in the United States. From the perspective of one formerly immersed in the gay culture, I can attest that the majority of the LGBT community are well educated Caucasians who have not suffered the civil injustices people of color have.

**Religious Argument:** *It is necessary to redefine marriage and sexual identity as a cultural norm in order to justify living as one's "authentic self," according to one's primary attractions.*

God created sexuality as complete and perfect; however, as the result of sin entering the world, humanity now lives with sexual and relational brokenness. People are using the term "authentic self" to describe what is actually flesh, the part of us operating independently from God and His intentions for us.

The cultural tide is sweeping the church, not only accepting but affirming men and women who chose their primary identity

as gay rather than as a redeemed child of God. Furthermore, many so-called “gay Christians” are advocating redefining God’s design for marriage and sexuality as it is stated in the Bible. (So many people have become desensitized to this label or identity that it fails to disturb any more. How would we respond if a group started a “Christian swingers” or “KKK for Christ” movement?)

This position diminishes the integrity of the Bible as absolute Truth and God-inspired, with the ability to evaluate and direct our lives to become the people God calls us to be.

For those who embrace the Biblical definition of marriage being between one man and one woman, there are moral, ethical and theological implications—for Christians, churches, and pastors in Texas, the United States and beyond. We must not succumb to the cultural tidal wave challenging God’s definition of marriage. Be brave and courageous, friends. Stand firm in God’s Truth. Keep a level head and a calm spirit, and speak the truth in love.

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[www.dallasnews.com/news/state/headlines/20150219-women-wed-in-texas-first-same-sex-marriage-but-union-contested.ece](http://www.dallasnews.com/news/state/headlines/20150219-women-wed-in-texas-first-same-sex-marriage-but-union-contested.ece)



Follow Hope’s blog, Hope’s Pathway, at [hopespathway.wordpress.com/](http://hopespathway.wordpress.com/)

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# Pen > 'Puter

*Sue Bohlin blogs about the value of writing by hand compared to only keyboarding.*

We recently observed National Handwriting Day (in case you didn't know, yes it's a thing). Some people think handwriting is an irrelevant remnant of the pre-technological past, rendered obsolete by the keyboard; many elementary schools don't even teach cursive writing anymore. A friend wrote a note to a young relative inside a greeting card, and the boy handed it back saying, "I don't know how to read this kind of writing." Do you know what we call people who can't read writing? Illiterate! How very sad!

But handwriting is neither obsolete nor irrelevant. Studies have shown that we learn better and remember more when we take notes by hand than when we type on a keyboard. When we write notes by hand, we process what we're hearing and reframe it, reflecting and paraphrasing in ways that lead to better understanding and remembering.

Brain researchers have discovered that we use more of our brain when writing by hand than by using a keyboard. That may have to do with the fact that we use more senses when writing by hand on paper; not only do we see what we're writing, but we hear the sounds that paper makes, we smell the fragrances of paper and ink, and it's a very kinesthetic, hands-on experience. That's probably why we retain more when we read from a newspaper or actual book rather than from a screen—more senses are involved so more gets "written" into our brain.

Researchers have also learned that we generate more ideas when writing by hand, making us more creative and better thinkers. Since writing by hand is slower than typing, it gives us the

margin to engage our mind in ways that don't happen when we're zipping along typing 75 words per minute.

Barbara Getty and Inga Dubay, who have written a wonderful curriculum for [teaching Italic handwriting](#), discovered that children's grades improved as they learned to write in legible, beautiful forms.

And then there's the spiritual element of handwriting.

Over forty years of following Christ and being a student of His word, I have discovered that it makes a big difference when I keep a notebook or journal in which I write down what I see as I read the Bible and respond to it. I learn and retain more of what I'm reading and studying. But there's another blessing to be had: something special and sometimes wondrous happens in that holy place where my pen meets the paper. Maybe it's because of the speed of writing as opposed to typing, but it seems that the Holy Spirit is able to lead me more clearly and specifically when I'm writing by hand. I'm able to "connect the dots" better. It seems that insights come more easily with a pen in my hand rather than my hands on a keyboard. This is true whether I'm journaling from my heart, processing life before the Lord, or recording the insights I receive from reading scripture.

I don't know who first said that "Thoughts untangle themselves over the lips and through the fingertips," but they are right. There is power in writing! Go grab a pen and a notebook and enjoy what happens next.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/pen\\_\\_puter](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/pen__puter) on January 27, 2015.

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# God and CSI, Take 2

At our house, conversations about ID usually aren't about "identification." It means "Intelligent Design."

My husband Ray's entire education is in science, including a Ph.D. in molecular biology. Early in his Christian walk, learning there was evidence against evolution lit a fire under him that has only grown in the 35 years since. Today, he is thrilled by advances in science that on an almost-monthly basis reveal more and more evidence that an intelligence is the only reasonable explanation for many aspects of the natural world.

But that doesn't sit well with people who don't want to be accountable to the God they know perfectly well is there, but spend endless hours and countless books (and YouTube videos) denying it.

The anti-God attitude was well known to the apostle Paul, who said in Romans 1:19-20, ". . .that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Eventually, it poisoned the very core of most science today. The early scientists like Galileo and Newton made important discoveries about the Creation because their starting point was a belief in an intelligent, orderly Creator who wove orderliness into His creation. They believed that the orderliness and principles of the natural world were knowable because our God is knowable. But then, Darwin's theory of evolution allowed people to embrace science without buying into the "God part" of it. Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*) said that "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually

fulfilled atheist." And today, it is now assumed that the very nature of science excludes anything supernatural. This has nothing to do with the evidence and everything to do with people's hearts.

When we "X" God out of our thinking, we feel free to redefine things any way we want, since we no longer feel beholden to His view of reality. I was thinking the other day that if Las Vegas decided it didn't like its crime statistics, all it needs to do is define crime away. Can you imagine if the city went to the CSI investigators and said, "You know all those dead bodies you deal with? From now on, you need to find a natural explanation for those deaths."

And the CSI people would say, "But most of the deaths we investigate aren't naturally caused. They are caused by human beings."

LV: Not any more. If all people die from natural causes, then we've done away with crime. And we are totally committed to doing away with crime in Las Vegas.

CSI: But we're committed to following the evidence no matter where it leads. If the evidence implies a killer, we can't say it's a natural death.

LV: Our commitment is eliminating crime. If you can't come up with natural causes for these deaths, we'll bring in CSIs who can.

CSI: So when we find someone face down on a desk, with a wound indicating something long and sharp was stabbed from the back of the neck into the victim's mouth. . .?

LV: Keep researching until you find a completely natural explanation. And stop using needlessly prejudicial words like "victim." There is no more crime in this city because we have declared it so. Your findings have to be consistent with the new city policy.

And that's what it's like to be a scientist these days. Don't believe me? Watch Ben Stein's movie *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* .

And go "Arrrrrggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!"

This is a revised version of the [blog post](#) originally published on October 7, 2008

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## Want It To Go Well With You?



When our sons were young, one of their favorite Golden Books was *Tootle the Train*. It was the story of a baby train who was in school to learn to be a Flyer, but he kept jumping off the track to go play in the meadow. It took all the people in the town

working together to convince him that a train needs to “stay on the rails no matter what.”

For a short while in the book, Tootle buys into the lie that life can be found in the meadow, racing horses and making daisy chains among the buttercups. But if you're a train and you go off the rails, you don't have a good time playing in the meadow—you get stuck in the dirt! Ever heard the phrase “train wreck”? It's what happens when a train doesn't “stay on the rails no matter what.”

Trains weren't made to run on grass, they were made to run on rails. Staying on the rails is the only way Tootle could be the train he was designed to be.

This book reminds me that God's truth and precepts are like the rails on which a good life runs. God *wants* us to have good lives! Six times in the book of Deuteronomy, God tells us that the reason He wants us to obey His commands is *that it may go well with us*:

Deuteronomy 4:40 "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, ***that it may go well with you*** and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time."

Deuteronomy 5:16 "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and ***that it may go well with you*** on the land which the LORD your God gives you."

Deuteronomy 5:33 "You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and ***that it may be well with you***, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you will possess."

Deuteronomy 6:3 "O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, ***that it may be well with you*** and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey."

Deuteronomy 6:18 "You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, ***that it may be well with you*** and that you may go in and possess the good land which the LORD swore to give your fathers,"

Deuteronomy 12:28 "Be careful to listen to all these words which I command you, so ***that it may be well with you*** and your sons after you forever, for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God."

Do you want it to "be well with you"? Of course you do! We all do!

There's only one way, and that is to live our lives according to God's plan and design and purpose for us. And there's only way to do that: to read and study His word so we can learn His plan and design and purpose for us. There are no shortcuts.

Researchers have determined that when people read their Bibles at least four times a week, life change happens. That's the tipping point.

Do you want it to go well with you this next year? How about opening your Bible—or Bible app—and reading God's word at least four times a week?

Bible.org offers several Bible reading plans: [bible.org/Daily\\_Bible\\_Reading\\_Plans](http://bible.org/Daily_Bible_Reading_Plans)

Or you can jump on board at Join the Journey as we go “rim to rim,” Genesis to Revelation, this year: [www.jointhejourney.com](http://www.jointhejourney.com)

Let's go . . . so it will go well with you.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/want\\_it\\_to\\_go\\_well\\_with\\_you](http://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/want_it_to_go_well_with_you) on December 30, 2014

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## **Baylor the Lap Dog**

This is Baylor, our Golden Retriever. He is a giant sucking funnel of attention and affection. He does not understand the concept of “enough.” And he worships—he ADORES—my husband Ray. His favorite position to do that is in Ray's lap. But last week, the center of Baylor's universe had hip replacement surgery. Needless to say, nobody, especially Baylor, is

allowed in Ray's lap.



And Baylor does not understand this.

All he knows is that his lord and master, his sun, moon, and stars, went away for a couple of days and when he came back, he was walking gingerly, leaning on a strange silver contraption to help him walk, and not allowing Baylor in his lap. Not even next to him in his chair. Thus the sad, sad picture.

Watching this heart-wrencher unfold, I am reminded of a major spiritual truth: just as Baylor cannot possibly understand why he is not allowed in Ray's lap, much less the concept of hip replacement surgery, we cannot possibly see the whole picture of any trial or disappointment or suffering we experience.

All we can see, all we can feel, all we can figure out is that we are hurt or angry or both, and it sure doesn't feel fair. That's because all we have is our puny little limited perspective. There is always a much bigger picture we can't see, but God does. He not only sees every detail of the big picture of our situation, He also knows how our situation will play out into the future. He knows how He will redeem our pain and our confusion. He knows why it is essential to trust Him, because He loves us and He knows what He's doing.

As the great theologian Charles Spurgeon said, "God is too good to be unkind, He is too wise to be mistaken, and when you can't trace His hand, that's when you must learn to trust His

heart.”

When Ray and I look at Baylor, our hearts hurt for the pained misunderstanding on his sweet face. I can't help but wonder if our heavenly Father looks on us with an infinitely greater compassion when we find ourselves in Baylor's shoes—er, paws, overwhelmed by confusion and questions because of what we cannot see and cannot know.

We know that within a couple of weeks, Ray will be healed enough to welcome Baylor back into his chair and into his lap—but we can't communicate that to poor Baylor with his limited doggie mind. But God has communicated a magnificent promise to us, His children: that He is able to make all things work together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).



That means we can trust Him. And, like Ray and Baylor, our heavenly Father will call us into His lap.

This  
blog post originally appeared at [Baylor the Lap Dog](#) on  
December 2, 2014.

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# The Euphemism of 'Death With Dignity'

There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is death. (Proverbs 14:12)



Brittany Maynard, a young woman with an incurable brain tumor, recently took her own life rather than suffer through a painful, difficult descent into natural death. She had moved from California to Oregon, which is a “right-to-die” state that allows terminally ill people to be assisted in ending their lives on their terms.

How should we think about this? It depends on your starting point.

If you leave God out of the picture, believing that man is autonomous with the right to make all our own choices independent of any outside source of moral truth, then avoiding needless pain and suffering makes sense. If you leave God out of the picture, then there is nothing particularly special about people as opposed to beloved pets, which we put down when their suffering becomes too great for us. If you leave God out of the picture, and you believe that life ends with your last breath on earth, then ending one’s life is really not much different from turning off a movie before its end because you’re tired and want to go to bed. If you leave God out of the picture, then it makes sense to do whatever you want.

But leaving God out of the picture doesn’t make Him go away.

It just means people are in denial about His existence. About

His right to determine life and death because He is the creator of life.

If your starting point is God Himself, who creates people for His pleasure and for His glory (Rev. 4:11, Eph. 1:6), then we are accountable to the Author of Life, and ending one's earthly life is not a choice we have the right to make. If your starting point is God Himself, who made us in His eternal image to live forever, then ending one's earthly life is the doorway to the next life. Not believing in life after death doesn't make it go away. As one character says in the movie *City of Angels*, "Some things are true whether you believe in them or not."

As far as we can tell from what the media presented, Brittany Maynard left God out of the picture in deciding to end her suffering. If she died as she may have lived her life, separated from the God who is created her, then even on her worst days of tumor-induced pain on earth, that was as close to heaven as she was ever going to get. If she remained separated from God as she drank a sedative mixture that allowed her to fall asleep and then die, she made a horrible choice to enter eternity remaining separated from God forever. That means separated from all that is good, from all that is kind, from all life and light and love and joy. Because all these things are found only in God, and if we remain separated from Him, we cut ourselves off from their source. We are left with evil, cruelty, death and darkness and isolation and despair. An eternity of it. There is no dignity in this kind of unending death.

It's possible that she cast herself on God's mercy in her last minutes; I don't know what the state of her soul was as she drew her last breath. I truly hope so.

But the horrific earthly suffering she opted out of, would be nothing compared to the eternal suffering of being cut off from all that is good. I don't mean to make light of the

indescribable suffering of those dying from terminal diseases. But it's essential to not leave God out of the picture, and to remember He does great things in people through suffering. Not just the one with the illness, but the family members and others around them.

Responding to this news about Ms. Maynard, one woman wrote of her husband, "a man who suffered well. It was agony... Watching him suffer. Knowing there was nothing I could do to heal him and little I could do to lessen his suffering. All I could do was hold his hand during biopsies and chemo. During the pain and nausea. I marveled at his strength, his faith, his refusal to give up. I held his hand when the doctor told us there wasn't anything else they could do. When the morphine caused hallucinations and he forgot we were married. I held his hand and discovered that if you love someone... If you have faith, you can tap unknown reserves of strength, you can endure pain unimaginable. Neither one if us picked the other for the ability to suffer well. But because we truly loved, we were able to put the other person first. That's love. All the feel good stuff is just romance. It's nice. It feels good. But it's small comfort when illness and death come knocking on your door. *I'm so blessed for having had the opportunity to suffer alongside B\_\_\_\_\_.* He was an amazing man!"

I think that is what true "death with dignity" looks like: being faithful to the end, suffering well, trusting God when the storm rages on.

Speaking of suffering well . . .

Hero to many of us, Joni Eareckson Tada wrote an [open letter](#) to Brittany weeks before she died. Joni has lived longer, and suffered more, than the vast majority of quadriplegics. She knows something of suffering, dealing with a severe handicap plus cancer plus chronic pain. Joni's voice deserves to be heard above all others, I believe:

“If I could spend a few moments with Brittany before she swallows that prescription she has already filled, I would tell her how I have felt the love of Jesus strengthen and comfort me through my own cancer, chronic pain and quadriplegia. I would tell her that the saddest thing of all would be for her to wake up on the other side of her tombstone only to face a grim, joyless existence not only without life, but without God.”

This is a deeply sobering, difficult discussion. Please don't leave God out of it.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/the\\_euphemism\\_of\\_death\\_with\\_dignity](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_euphemism_of_death_with_dignity) on November 4, 2014.

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## Gentle and Quiet . . . Whaaaaa???

A lot of women, women like me, have come to a full stop when reading in 1 Peter 3:3-4, where he challenges us:

“Your beauty should not consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold ornaments or fine clothes. Instead, it should consist of what is inside the heart with the imperishable quality of **a gentle and quiet spirit**, which is very valuable in God's eyes.”

A gentle and quiet spirit? Uh-oh.

Some of us have thought, “Oh man. I'm sunk. Is that what it means to be a godly woman? Gentle and quiet?”

Others have wondered, “But God! You made me with a big, loud personality! Why would Your word call me to be something other than who I am?”

And still others have fretted, “If a gentle and quiet spirit is valuable to God, what does that say about us party girls who love to laugh?”

Good news! A gentle and quiet SPIRIT is different from a gentle and quiet PERSONALITY. The Greek word for spirit is different from the word for soul, or personality. Our spirit is the part of us where God dwells, where He makes His home. A woman can have a dynamic, energetic, live-out-loud personality—and still glorify God in her gentle and quiet spirit.

If you look up the meaning of the words “gentle” and “quiet” in the New Testament’s original language, a treasure awaits—especially for us not-so-gentle-and-quiet personalities.

The Greek word translated “gentle” actually means *meekness*. Too bad we have no English word that properly translates this word. Meekness is seen as weakness or mildness. It’s not.



It’s more like “power wrapped in gentleness.” Or “strength wrapped in love.” Remember Arnold Schwarzenegger in the movie “Kindergarten Cop”? It’s not the actual movie, but the idea behind the title, that I think illustrates meekness: when a big, strong, burly man has to restrain his strength because he

is dealing with very small children.

The concept behind meekness is, "Don't be fooled by this gentle exterior; there is strength and power underneath."

Meekness is the result of a strong trust in God, when we are able to accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore we do not resist Him or dispute how He deals with us. Meekness is closely linked with humility. It means not fighting against God, and because we trust in God's goodness, we don't fight against men either—even evil people.

Meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is a settled, balanced spirit that is neither high on self nor down in the dumps, simply because it's not occupied with self at all.

There is a picture of a meek woman in Proverbs 31:25 – "She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come." She can laugh because she trusts God and knows He is good, and she doesn't fight Him as He deals with her.

The greatest example is the Lord Jesus, who said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart."

And then there's the matter of a quiet spirit.

This is not about being an [introvert](#) or being a woman of few words, but of a tranquil spirit, where the tranquility arises from within. The root word means "firm, immovable, steadfast."

A quiet spirit is tranquil because it believes God for who He is. A woman with a tranquil spirit knows how to rest in her trust in God. Many women exuding the beauty of a tranquil spirit are very familiar with Psalm 91, the great antidote for tranquility-stealers.

God says that a gentle and quiet spirit is of "great worth" in His sight. That's a pretty weak translation. It means VERY

precious, of great price. The same word is used of the spikenard ointment that Mary lavished over Jesus' feet when she anointed Him just before His death. It was worth three years' wages, and it greatly blessed the Lord that she poured it out on Him. A gentle and quiet spirit blesses Him the same way.

A woman with a gentle and quiet spirit is NOT passive, and she is not weak. She has a lot of power inside her because she is yielded to the Lord and takes great joy in trusting Him. She expects that His dealings with her are all good, and it gives her a great peace and tranquility.

One of the best things about a gentle and quiet spirit is that it's contagious. It can whet the appetite of others to trust God in the same way, with the beauty of an intimate love and trust that brings a calming influence to those she touches. Others go away thinking, "everything's going to be okay," because she lives it.

So . . . whew. On behalf of us not-so-gentle-and-quiet personality types. . . It's all good!

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