

Praying for Japan

I don't know about you, but the continuing news stream (March 15, 2011) of devastation in Japan just breaks my heart. The compassion of even the most tender-hearted person in the world, I believe, is just a drop in the bucket compared to the infinitely huge compassion of our God. He weeps over the death and destruction unleashed by the effects of sin in a fallen world. I cannot imagine the sound or the size of the tears of God.

But I think Jesus invites us to take His yoke upon us (Matthew 11:29) and co-labor with Him in intercessory prayer. How can we pray for such an unspeakable tragedy?

I think we can pray on a scale big and small. "Oh God, help Japan and the Japanese people" seems like such a pitifully inadequate prayer—and in our own puny human strength, it is. But the Word tells us that "the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26). We can trust the Holy Spirit to translate our inadequate, too-small prayers into the language of God. We can rely on Him to be faithful to His promise.

But then, we can also pray with the newspaper (or website) in hand, guided to pray for specific people highlighted in the news. I keep thinking about the man rescued on the rooftop of his house two days after the tsunami and almost ten miles out to sea. I think about how Jesus was with him on his roof as the house floated away from land, and when his wife slipped into the water. I pray for him, that he would be granted grace to sense Jesus' presence and comfort, and turn to Him in faith.



I pray for the people named in the *Dallas Morning News* stories, that they would not rest with the fact that their lives were spared, until they come to Jesus in faith. I pray for the spiritual cataracts that would keep them blind to His reality to fall from their eyes so they can see the truth: God loves them personally and passionately, and saved them from death for a reason.

I pray for the people not named, but mentioned: those searching for bodies. The survivors of lost loved ones. The officials responsible for cremating an unrealistic number of bodies. Those trying to restore water and electricity. The workers in the nuclear power plants who knowingly expose themselves to the risk of deadly levels of radiation. Those securing and those passing out food. Those plagued by nightmares that don't go away, and those who will help the traumatized process their terror. All of them need God's help and grace. Their ancestors will not help them. False gods will not help them. Only the true God is there for them.

And so I pray for the Christ-followers and the churches in Japan, few though they be, to shine in this time of breathtaking need, to be "Jesus with skin on" in this crisis.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, show up in Japan in a way never before seen.

And Lord, what would You have ME do?

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blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/praying_for_japan

Prayer Notch-Bumpers

This weekend my understanding of the power of prayer was bumped up a notch.

I was at a retreat that was being bathed in prayer; 50 young people, all battling unwanted same-sex attractions, gathered to find fellowship with each other and pursue greater intimacy with Jesus. The fact that they were there at all is an evidence of the power of God and the fact that He answers the prayers of their loved ones. The fact that so many of them are experienced some degree of change in the way they think and act, with a resulting change in the intensity of their feelings, is also evidence of the power of God. Nothing builds my faith like seeing His love and grace and power released into the lives of precious people like these dear friends of mine.

But the “notch-bumper” came in the form of two incidents.

Several of the board members of this ministry, of which I am one, came to teach seminars. After we finished, I visited with two of them, both pastors. We were talking about how spiritual warfare rages in the weeks before, during and after our retreats. One pastor said, “I confessed to the Lord the other day, ‘I know You say to pray without ceasing, but I just don’t.’ He said, ‘If I let you see for just one second the battle that rages around you, you would never stop.’” Whoa. It was a good reminder to not remain content with simply looking at the physical, material world as if that were all that exists. There are angels and demons at work and at war all

around us—all the time!

That night, while we were all singing worship songs, a young lady asked to speak to me outside in private. She asked permission to leave the building because she needed to be alone with God. I had a sense there might be something else going on even if I didn't know what it was, but the Lord didn't give me a "red light" in my spirit about letting her go. So we agreed that she would be back by 9:00.

By 9:10, she still hadn't returned. I started praying that the Holy Spirit would draw her back to the rest of us. I envisioned a rope tied around her heart, and in my spirit I kept pulling on the rope. A few minutes later she walked in the door with a funny look on her face. I walked over and gave her a long, warm hug, whispering, "I'm so glad you came back."

The next day a group of us were talking with her about her time alone with God. Apparently, she was unhappy with Him and was arguing with Him about something. I told her about my prayer and my pulling on the rope, and her eyes grew big. "That was *you*???" she asked. "I didn't want to go back, I had no intention of going back, but all of a sudden I found myself on my feet, and then I was walking back to the building where everyone was, and I was saying, 'What's going on? I don't want to do this!'" But then I found myself in the room with everyone."

It gave me spiritual goosebumps. When we abide in Jesus—the theme of the retreat—our prayers are His prayers, and He answers them. In ways that bring Him glory. . . and bring us goosebumps.

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March 1, 2011.

Dangerous Worldviews

Warm greetings from cold, cold Belarus, a country which is part of the former Soviet Union (between Poland and Russia). My husband and I are here this week to teach Christian worldview and apologetics to Christ-followers. One's [worldview](#) (and everyone has one, whether they know it or not) is comprised of a set of beliefs or presuppositions that are like a pair of glasses through which we interpret the world and our experiences in it.

In order to help our friends understand the importance of viewing reality accurately, which is only possible with a pair of glasses that consist of truths that align with what God has revealed in scripture, we brought along a prop. We brought a pair of goggles called "Drunk Busters" that give the wearer a dizzying approximation of what being drunk does to your vision. State police and drivers' education programs use them to demonstrate why it's deadly to drink and drive.

We ask for a volunteer to first navigate a simple obstacle course of chairs, catch an object we toss to them, and pick up that object from the floor. No one has any trouble doing these things.

Then they put on the goggles. They usually say, "Whoa!" It's very disorienting.

Navigating their way around the chairs, catching the objects we toss, and picking up anything from the floor suddenly becomes not only difficult but comical to those watching. Nothing is where they think it is. Their eyes lie to them about reality. If they were behind the wheel of a car, they would be very dangerous.

Then we make the point that having the wrong worldview, the

wrong set of beliefs and assumptions about reality, is also very dangerous.

It is dangerous eternally for a person to believe that God does not exist, or that God is anything other than what He has revealed Himself to be in His word and in His Son. It is equally disastrous for someone to believe in no God (atheism), and for someone to believe in a divine impersonal force that permeates everything (variations on pantheism).

But the wrong worldview can also be dangerous for Christians whose pair of glasses consists of a prescription with some truth and some error. The majority of American Christians who claim to be born again do not have a biblical worldview. What they believe differs from what the Bible says. For example, many believe in reincarnation. Many trust in astrology. Some believe that God is distant, angry, and doesn't particularly like us, that this "Gee-Oh-Dee" will begrudgingly let us into heaven only because Jesus died in our place. They don't understand that God is Father, Son and Spirit, Who have always loved us and welcome us enthusiastically into the circle of Their divine love, fellowship, joy and camaraderie.

Some believers think that they put their trust in Christ to save them when they die, but Jesus has nothing to say about their life between salvation and death. So they live their lives depending on the surrounding culture to give them wisdom and instruction about how to be educated, how to choose a mate and be married, how to parent, what kind of job to get, how to spend their money and other resources, and where to find satisfaction in their lives while they wait for heaven. They miss what Paul meant by "Christ, who is our life" (Col. 3:4). The phrase "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27) is only an abstract concept unrelated to the way they live their lives: essentially, "Jesus is in my heart, and I keep Him stashed there till it's time to go to heaven."

It's dangerous to have the wrong worldview that misses the

glorious truth that real life is only found in Jesus, that any love we give or receive comes from Jesus to and through us, that light comes from Jesus and all else is darkness. And it's far more tragic than bumping into an obstacle course or dropping a ball tossed to us.

How's your worldview? If your beliefs and the things you assume are not corrected and established by God's word, invite Him to change your prescription, and expect Him to joyfully start to transform your thinking!

Lord Jesus, transform me by renewing my mind (Romans 12:2). I don't even know what I don't know; I don't know what my blind spots are, and I don't know what I have wrong in my thinking. I invite You to change me from the inside out so I think like You!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/dangerous_worldview on Feb. 15, 2011

Pods, Aliens, and the Incarnation

There is a moment in the 1985 sci-fi movie *Cocoon* that has haunted me for 25 years now. Senior citizens discover that the water in the pool they've been swimming in has a marvelously rejuvenating effect on them. Aliens have stashed the cocoon pods of their cohorts in the bottom of the pool of a rented house, awaiting their return to the mother ship.

These aliens are light-filled, radiant creatures who cover

themselves in human skin to pass as one of us.

The moment in the film that has stayed with me all this time is when the lead alien, played by Brian Dennehy, checks his human disguise in the mirror. He pulls down his lower eyelid, revealing the light within that shoots out in a beam. I gasped internally: what a picture of the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ!



Now the Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We saw his glory – the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father. (John 1:14)

When the Lord Jesus wrapped Himself in human flesh and entered our world, He did not leave His glory behind—He covered it up. “Glory” can mean splendor and brilliance and magnificence, but it also connotes the essential nature of a person or thing. Jesus brought His essential nature of the eternally existent Father’s Son into His human body, into our world. John 1 tells us that Jesus brought with Him—because He is—life, light, truth, fullness. He embodies the things our broken souls long for.

I love the Incarnation. I love the fact that Jesus entered into our “garbage pail” of human darkness and brokenness to redeem it all. I love that He brought His light and His glory into our blindness and lifelessness. But (in the famous words of the TV infomercials) . . . “That’s not all!”

I am still amazed that not only did the Lord of glory “tabernacle among us” (John 1:14), not only did He pitch His tent in our midst, He gladly sets up house inside us! When we accept the Father, Son and Spirit’s invitation to join Their circle of divine love and joy and fellowship and community, He brings His glory *inside of us!* Literally!

Suddenly, the image of the light inside the Brian

Dennehy/alien character is not just about Jesus being light on the inside and human flesh on the outside, it's a picture of "Christ in [us], the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). He brings HIS light inside of us.

Amazing. Staggering. And yet it's real, it's true, and if we lived it out, if we lived an incarnational life of allowing Jesus to express the love and glory of God through what we think and say and do, the people in our lives would think, "Where do I get me some of that??"

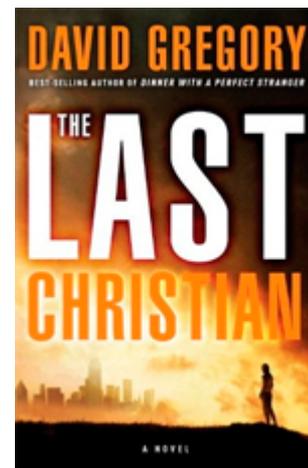
Oh Lord Jesus! Deepen my understanding of this truth so that I continually choose to let You live Your glory through me, drawing others to Yourself!

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blogs.bible.org/pods-aliens-and-the-incarnation/
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The Last Christian

I just finished another novel by one of my favorite authors, [David Gregory](#). I really enjoyed *The Last Christian* for several reasons, including the creation of characters I truly cared about, but there are two big reasons that I find myself continuing to think about.

The book is set in 2088. Abby Caldwell, who grew up as the daughter of missionaries in Papua New Guinea in a tribe cut off from the rest of the world, comes back to the U.S. and learns that Christianity has died out. She is “the last Christian.” Her grandparents had left her a message sixteen years before telling her that God had impressed on both of them that she was His choice to bring Christianity back to this country, but because she had no contact with the outside world, she hadn’t received it. At the same time as Abby’s entry to American culture (quite a shock for someone who grew up in a primitive jungle culture), stories start popping up on “the Grid” about people having dreams of Jesus.



One reason the book was compelling is its explanation of how Christianity died out. One of the main characters is a history professor at a Dallas university who gives a five-point lecture about what rendered Christianity so irrelevant and obsolete as to have no presence in the culture at all. The biggest point was the lack of distinctiveness between believers and unbelievers. Since professing Christians had the same beliefs and the same behaviors of those with no allegiance to Christ, there was no reason for anyone to become a Christian.

And that’s where we are today in 2011: in an excruciatingly dangerous position of losing our Christian voice in the culture because in the majority of our lives, Jesus Christ makes absolutely no difference at all. At Probe Ministries, we call this being “[culturally captive](#).” When our beliefs and behaviors are informed and shaped more by the surrounding culture than by the Word of God and the character of God, we have been taken captive. Paul warned the first-century Christians about this very thing: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according

to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8). *The Last Christian* paints a chilling scenario of what could happen right here in the United States, just as the light has gone out in Europe (except for small pockets of believers—God is still faithful!).

The other thing I really loved about the book is the heroine's progression of understanding of her faith. When she arrives in the U.S., convinced God wants her to share the gospel with her home country, she defines it as "we are sinners and Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sin so we can go to heaven when we die." Naturally, this message does not resonate with a completely secular audience. The author uses marvelous means to enlighten her to the much larger, far more compelling description of the gospel as the truly good news that God invites us into His life, a quality of abundance and joy and love *today* that is so much bigger than simply having one's ticket-to-heaven card punched.

For the past year, reading through all four gospels, I've been meditating a lot on what Jesus preached: the Kingdom of God, which He sometimes also called the Kingdom of Heaven. *The Kingdom is a party!* Do a word search for "kingdom" in the New Testament, and you'll see it connected with words like righteousness, peace, joy, power, treasure, fine pearls, fruit, and eating and drinking at God's table. Sounds like a party to me! In John's gospel, Jesus refers to the kingdom as "life." Over and over and over again.

If people saw the Christian life as being connected to the source of life—Jesus our Lord—and saw Christians living lives marked by peace, joy, power, treasure, fruitfulness, and a radiant quality of life that comes from letting Jesus shine through us in His beauty and power, we wouldn't need to fear that the horrible scenario painted in *The Last Christian* will come to pass.

Party on!

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The Gender Spectrum

When I use the term “gender spectrum,” you might think in terms of masculinity on one end and femininity on the other. We hear men being prompted to “get in touch with your feminine side.” (For some reason, women never seem to be exhorted to “get in touch with your masculine side.” Huh.)



But I don't think that's the way it works.

In Genesis 1, we are told that “God created them male and female” (Genesis 1:27). I think, rather, that there is one spectrum of masculinity and another spectrum of femininity. I also think that God is the one who chooses where on the spectrum babies are born, according to His design and for His pleasure and glory.

The Femininity Spectrum

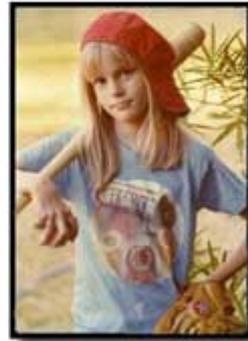
I suggest that little girls come into the world at some point on a femininity spectrum. On one end is the girly-girl who comes out of the womb asking for the little flower headband to wear in the hospital nursery, and she keeps on running toward all things frilly and girly. She loves pink, loves to wear dresses and twirl around to “be pretty,” wants to wear nail polish and makeup just like Mommy (or like the other ladies she sees on TV).



Femininity Spectrum



Girly-girl.....Tomboy



On the other end of the spectrum is the tomboy jockette, who can't stand wearing dresses, wants to climb trees and play tackle football with the boys. These girls are often gifted athletically and many are natural leaders. When these little girls' type of femininity is supported and encouraged, they are comfortable in their skin just the way God made them. Wise parents also make sure they wear dresses and "act like a lady" when it's time to do that—with the promise that when they get home, they can put their jeans or sweats back on and be comfortable.

Sometimes, though, girly-girl types can morph into "mean girls" and inform the jockettes that they're not good enough as girls, and they can receive the message that it's not okay to be the kind of girl they are, the kind of girl God chose for them to be because He has a good plan for them. They can grow up not feeling secure in their femininity.

The Masculinity Spectrum

On one end is the rough-and-tumble boy—athletic, noisy, enjoys getting dirty. He bonds to other boys shoulder-to-shoulder, engaging in common activities or tasks, and tends to find

face-to-face interaction intimidating.



Masculinity Spectrum



Rough-and-tumble. Sensitive/creative



On the other end of the spectrum from the *athletic* boy is the *aesthetic* boy: emotionally sensitive, gifted in art, music, theater, dance, or some other kind of art. He usually avoids athletics, getting dirty, and anything having to do with balls coming at him. He bonds eyeball-to-eyeball, connecting to others' hearts through their eyes the way most girls do, but they are not girls. And then, of course, there is everything in between.

In our culture, we tend to define masculinity in terms of the rough-and-tumble type ONLY, but I don't think God agrees, since He delights to create so many sensitive boys and those who are a balance between the two. In fact, even as toddlers, they can reveal themselves by responding to another child's upset by dropping what they're doing and going over to pat them, soothe them, and attempt to comfort them: "You okay? It's okay." This sensitivity is a beautiful thing to behold, but it can get a little boy in trouble. Since we define masculinity so narrowly, it is easy to marginalize and shame the masculinity of the sensitive boy. Especially if his daddy

is a rough-and-tumble sort of man who is flummoxed by a little boy who would rather Daddy read to him than throw a football.

If the sensitive boy is affirmed in his type of masculinity, he can grow up to be a phenomenal husband, father, pastor, counselor, artist, musician, dancer—the list goes on. When tomboy girls are loved and accepted by their parents just the way they are, they can grow up to be great moms and teachers and scout leaders, especially of boys. If, however, they are ostracized for the way they are designed, they can burn with the indignity of being “other than.”

It's these sensitive, gifted boys that are most at risk for embracing a gay identity, especially when others wound them by slapping false labels on them, even from a young age: gay, queer, homo, fag. Tomboy girls, especially the ones gifted athletically, are quickly tagged with ugly false labels as well: lez, queer, gay. They can easily think, “What do others know that I don't know? If they say it, it must be true.”

But it's *not* true. They're not gay, they're gifted. If only they could be helped to see themselves that way!

Our goal as adults should be to help all children grow into gender-secure, emotionally healthy kids who are glad God made them a boy or a girl, and are comfortable in their own skins just the way God made them. I think it starts with affirming the different kinds of masculinity and femininity. It's ALL good!

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on January 4, 2011.

Unrealistic Expectations

Lots of things can keep us stuck in places that are hard to get out of.

Like harboring unrealistic expectations.

When my first son was four years old, I found myself angry and frustrated with him a lot. One day I “happened” to see a book on the inspirational display at the grocery store, *Overcoming Hurts and Anger*. I don’t remember anything else from that book except the wise counsel to adjust your unrealistic expectations. I realized that although my son was four, and a smart, prodigious four at that, it was still not fair to expect him to be and do things appropriate for a twelve-year old. It was amazing how much happier I was when I decided to expect four-year-old things of him!

Many people have unrealistic expectations of what growth and change should look like. The downside of our microwave culture is that we expect things to be fixed instantly. Last week a friend who is just starting out a long journey of overcoming a lot of hurts from her past asked what she could do to speed up the process. I suggested she work to build daily the always-popular habit of saying no to her flesh and yes to self-control, loving others, and doing the opposite of what comes naturally. Fifteen minutes later she texted me with a question: “I hate people today. Can I stay home from church?”

So much for the fast track!

One of the most dangerous places for our unrealistic expectations, though, is what we think God should do. Some of the most bitter and angry people I know, or who have loud voices in the culture (think of the [“new atheists”](#) like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris) are those who feel betrayed by God, so they decide He isn’t there.

That sense of betrayal and disappointment comes from having expectations of God according to how we *think* He should act:

- Protect the innocent from pain and suffering
- Protect the people who maybe-aren't-so-innocent-but-not-as-bad-as-axe-murderers from pain and suffering
- Show the same grace to all of us by treating us all the same
- Give us an easy life
- If I do all the right things to be "a good person," God should do His part to make life work the way I want it to

When we pray fervently for what we want and He doesn't answer the way we want, many of us get angry with Him. That's a part of [my story](#). It's easy to decide God doesn't care, or He is evil, or He isn't there at all.

Many times, we pray in faith, believing God will give us what we ask for, but we ask for things He never promised in the first place. Or even worse, we "claim" them on the basis of a scriptural promise wrenched out of context, such as "all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). Jesus never promised that if we believe *in our prayers*, we would receive what we ask for. *Believing* in the Bible is all about trusting in and surrendering to the goodness and character of GOD, not our prayer list. We will always receive an answer to our prayers because God is good. Sometimes the answer is "No, beloved," because we ask amiss. Psalm 84:11 promised, "No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly." If God says "no," it's because it's not a good thing *for us*. [His "no" is a "yes" to something else.](#) But because we have such a limited perspective, it is essential that we trust in the unlimited perspective of the God who sees everything.

When we feel disappointed in God, when we think, "God didn't come through for me," that's the time to take a step back and ask, "What kind of unrealistic expectations did I have in the first place?" That may be a great question to talk through

with a mature trusted friend who can see things more clearly. Then we can place the unrealistic part of our expectations into God's hands as an act of worship and trust . . . and watch our anger and frustration subside.

I'll share some thoughts about why those expectations of God are unrealistic in [my next blog post](#).

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/unrealistic_expectations
on Oct. 11, 2010.

Why Our Expectations of God Are Unrealistic

In my last blog post I talked about "[Unrealistic Expectations](#)" and promised to explore some of the reasons our expectations of God are unrealistic (and thus why we get frustrated or even furious with Him). I mentioned several ways in which we think God *should* act. Here are my responses to why those expectations are unrealistic.

- *Show the same grace to all of us by treating us all the same*

No child ever has to be taught about fairness. The heart's cry for justice is part of our design. But we are broken in our understanding of so many things, and we usually equate fairness with equality. We want God to treat everyone the same way. But God isn't doing the same thing in everyone; He is creating a masterpiece that will bring glory to Him and goodness to us for all eternity, and His means and tools will differ from person to person. Creating a masterpiece of

sculpture in a piece of marble takes different tools and techniques than creating a masterpiece of an oil painting. It's a good thing that God doesn't treat us all the same.

- *Give us an easy life*

Easy, sheltered, enabled lives produce spoiled, entitled children. God's intention is that we grow up to maturity, which necessitates learning to survive the bumps in the road and the harder aspects of living in a fallen world. He is creating an adult, glorious bride for the Lamb, who is fit to reign with Him. An easy life is completely inadequate to the task of preparing us as the church to become the bride of Christ.

- *If I do all the right things to be "a good person," God should do His part to make life work the way I want it to*

That linear "A ensures B" kind of thinking makes sense to our limited, immature minds, but reality doesn't work that way. We cannot manipulate God to make life work the way we want it to. We are part of a much bigger picture that involves spiritual warfare, the battle against our own flesh, and God's purposes that can only be accomplished in ways we don't understand in the process.

One of the most important places of understanding God wants us to reach is the profound truth I saw on a t-shirt once:

2 essential truths:

1. There is a God.
2. You are not him.

God is God, and we are not. We don't get to dictate the way life works, and God will lovingly bring us to the point, as many times as necessary, where we let go of the illusion that we are in control.

He is in control. We are not. And that's a good thing.

But the granddaddy of unrealistic, albeit understandably so, expectations are these:

- *Protect the innocent from pain and suffering*
- *Protect the people who maybe-aren't-so-innocent-but-not-as-bad-as-axe-murderers from pain and suffering*

This is really the bottom line issue for most problems with our understanding of God, the age-old difficult question, "How can a good and loving God allow pain and suffering?"

The bottom line answer is that because of the sinful choices of Adam and Eve, we all live in a world where evil and suffering were unleashed. Our world is now fallen and corrupt, and bad things happen all the time. Part of the equation is that God honors our choices, which are significant and real—even the choices that bring unintended consequences of pain and suffering. Yet God is in control, and He can redeem even the most heinous choices and the most awful pain and suffering. He delights to exchange "a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isaiah 61:3).

We have a hard time imagining how God can bring good out of evil, and especially out of our pain. Sometimes it's even harder when we look outside ourselves, to the suffering of innocent children such as the growing number of children abused and murdered by their mothers' boyfriends. And I really don't have an answer for that; I just know that God is good, and He is loving, and my inability to see how He will make it all okay in the end does not affect whether it's true or not.

One of my favorite stories comes from my dear friend whom I'll call Emily, who was not only raped repeatedly by her father from the time she was two years old, but he would take money from his friends so they could abuse her as well. Emily has a vibrant relationship with Jesus, especially because she has

learned to listen to Him.

One day after the Holy Spirit gently restored a vivid memory of one of these gang-rape sessions for her to process, she said, "Jesus, I had a sense of being covered in something heavy, like a stack of blankets, while the abuse was going on. What was that about?" The Lord lovingly told her, "That was Me lying on top of you, protecting you from the full brunt of the abuse you were experiencing. The men had to come through Me to get to you, and I took a portion of their evil into Myself before it got to you." Through her tears, she asked, "But why? How could there possibly be any good to come out of that horrific sexual abuse?" Jesus said, "Beloved, you are a diamond of great value. Every incident of abuse that you sustained was a hammer and chisel in My Father's hands, creating a new facet in the diamond. When you see the finished product, you won't believe the stunning beauty of the jewel that you are. And you will say it was worth it."

(Incidentally, Emily hasn't had to wait till heaven to start seeing the value of her horrific suffering. She has been able to be "Jesus with skin on" to other wounded women and children because she understands their suffering.)

The reason our expectations of God are so often unrealistic is because He is so much bigger, so much more glorious, so much more loving, so much more in control, than we can possibly comprehend. May we grow in our understanding as He continues to prove Himself faithful and good—in everything.

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Judge Shows : Spiritual Reality TV

I've been listening to a lot of TV lately.

I'm a [calligrapher](#), and November/December is my busy season. I look for the kind of shows that don't need to be watched because I'm focused on my hand lettering. So I've been listening to quite a few of the courtroom shows: Judge Judy, Judge Alex, Judge Marilyn, Judge Lynn, Judge Joe, and the others.

Lessons to be learned from judge shows:

- Some people don't know how to communicate without interrupting and talking over each other where neither can hear what the other is saying.
- When people roll their eyes and spit out contempt for each other, it's okay.
- There's nothing like money to break up friendships and family. Especially if you don't get _____ in writing.
- People go to court because there isn't an adult (read: parent) to mediate the way mom and dad used to referee sibling fights.
- People don't mind being exposed as foolish as long as they get their 15 minutes of fame on TV.
- People who watch judge shows will call into the program to give their opinion on a case that was closed long before it aired, and then listen to a sales pitch of their own free will.

I watch TV with a [biblical worldview filter](#) in place. I'm constantly comparing what I see and hear to what the Bible says. There's nothing like the judge shows to support a biblical view of people and of life in a fallen world. The brokenness of people doing life by their own rules, apart from God's wisdom and power, is just *so sad*.

People want to be loved and respected and valued and honored, and those are legitimate desires. But when they don't feel loved or respected, they'll act in unloving and disrespectful ways toward others.

People's hearts are hungry for what will fill them, but if they refuse to turn to the One who promised to "make their joy complete" (John 16:24), they will take the counterfeit of greed and materialism.

People haven't been taught biblical conflict resolution, and their pride often keeps them from taking responsibility for their part in a conflict and asking forgiveness for it.

Sin makes us messed up people, and part of the messed up-ness involves a willingness to make it public.

So these shows are a kind of painfully true "spiritual reality show."

How God must wince—and weep.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/judge_shows_spiritual_reality_tv

on Dec. 21, 2010.

Mommy Blogger Outs Her 5-Year Old Son

Last week, a mommy blogger caused a firestorm with her blog post [“My Son is Gay”](#) about how her 5-year-old dressed up for Halloween as Daphne from Scooby Doo. Her little boy had had second thoughts about wearing the costume, afraid that people would make fun of him, but she pushed him to wear it to his preschool. “Who would make fun of a child in a costume on Halloween?” she wrote.

Well, lots of people. And she was angry.

“If you think that me allowing my son to be a female character for Halloween is somehow going to ‘make’ him gay then you are an idiot. Firstly, what a ridiculous concept. Secondly, if my son is gay, OK. I will love him no less. Thirdly, I am not worried that your son will grow up to be an actual ninja so back off.”

Her post generated more than 26,000 comments and has gone viral as people blogged about it (like this one).

This mom doesn’t have any problem with the idea that her son who likes bright colors and is attracted to a female costume might be gay, but I wonder what his dad thinks.

There is another way to think about boys like this. They don’t have to be gender-confused; they are just created by God to be artistic, creative, and emotionally sensitive. They love color and texture, they revel in nuances in sound and light, touch and smell. They are God’s gift to us: the musicians, the artists, the poets, the actors. When these boys are supported in their God-given flavor of masculinity (especially by their fathers), they can grow up to be great men who contribute their gifts to the church, to the world, and to their families. They make great counselors, pastors, teachers—and

husbands and fathers.

My dear friend Ricky Chelette from Living Hope Ministries wrote an insightful article "[Parenting the Sensitive Soul](#)." He allays the fears of a growing number of parents of young boys who come to his office concerned that their boys are too girly. And Ricky, an incredible artist, writer, singer, cook—and devoted husband of 20 years—tells them their boys are not being effeminate, they are merely expressing their giftedness. He writes about what he explained to a worried dad:

"I reassured the father that his son did not want to be a girl and the only person that was really saying anything about him being a girl was the dad. But why then was this boy drawn towards things which were typically identified as more feminine than masculine? Simply, he was a very sensitive soul.

"Sensitive boys are real boys. They simply are extremely gifted with particular giftings that manifest in emotionally and aesthetically expressive ways. His little boy's obsession with women's shoes were not because he wanted to be a girl, but more because he was aesthetically and visually oriented—and women's shoes are much more visually exciting than the black, brown or burgundy of men's shoes. Women's shoes have sparkles, bobbles and bows. They come in every color imaginable and are in different shapes and textures. They are an aesthetically gifted boy's dream! And he was not trying to identify as a girl when he grabbed his mother's skirt, put it on, and twirled around. To him, it was similar to our experience of going to the fair and doing drop art projects where we drop paint on a spinning paper and watch it splatter, but even better. As he moved, he created art and beauty as the colors whirled around him and flowed up and down in the air. Better yet, he was the center of it all!

“The dad looked at me with disbelief, but with a sense of relief. ‘Do you mean he really isn’t trying to be a girl?’

“‘Absolutely not,’ I replied. ‘He is simply trying to express his giftedness as best he can. You have a very artistic young man with amazing potential to make this world a more beautiful place. He has the creative and masculine heart of God. You have the privilege of finding ways to affirm those gifts and channel them in a way that he can grow as gifted man of God!’

“It was as though I just found the lost key they had been searching to find for years; suddenly despair was replaced by hope and relief. But those feelings of relief were just as quickly followed by a look of bewilderment.

“‘But how do I do that? How do I affirm him in those gifts when I obviously don’t even understand what he is thinking or why he is doing what he is doing?’”

Read the rest of his article to find out: [Parenting the Sensitive Soul](#).

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/mommy_blogger_outs_her_5-year_old_son
on Nov. 9, 2010.