

# Suicide Has Hit Our Family

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

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

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

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

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

Some themes have been rolling around in my head since the news of his passing.

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

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

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

Fourth, God keeps pouring out His goodness on us every time we turn around. We have been inundated with people wanting to help us with everything we need from money for funeral expenses, to food and paper goods, to willing hands to prepare our home for family coming in for his memorial service. And that includes being willing to clean out his room and haul away all the furniture that reeked of body odor. In case you don't know, severely depressed people usually don't care about personal hygiene, and both our son and his room stank from weeks, sometimes months, of going unwashed. It was a source of sorrow and frustration to us, but we loved him in his mental illness and just lived with it.

Fifth, there is the blessing of *not knowing* so many things. I don't know what he was thinking when something flipped and he went from offering to cook lunch for the family visiting us,

to leaving our home intent on stepping off an overpass. I don't know what he was thinking or feeling on that walk. I don't know what his last seconds were like, and I am most grateful that we didn't have to identify him at the medical examiner's office. I don't know so many things, and I am so glad. I can leave all those questions in the Lord's hands, and I can ask him when I see him again-if it matters at all by then.

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

I had the privilege of leading Curt to put his trust in Jesus Christ when he was three years old, watching him grow in his faith over the years, watching him bear the spiritual fruit that proved his faith was real. I know he's in heaven, because to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Our dear friend Dave commented on my Facebook post, "I am heartbroken for your loss but so grateful for your hope that you will see Curt again." That's when I had the lightbulb moment and I replied, "Thanks for using the word HOPE. Future-facing faith. My hope about seeing Curt is as strong as my view of Ray this very minute. Who is sitting three feet from me."

Curt's first week in heaven: it felt like he was just on the other side of the invisible wall separating earth from heaven. Maybe it's the special bond between a mother and the child she bore, maybe it's something spiritual, I don't know. But the reality of my son's new home makes heaven closer to me than it

has ever been. My husband Ray has said for years that heaven is more real to me than anyone he knows. Part of it is knowing our baby Rebecca is there, part of it is longing for my new body untouched by polio and cancer.

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

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/suicide-has-hit-our-family](https://blogs.bible.org/suicide-has-hit-our-family) on July 16, 2024.

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

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

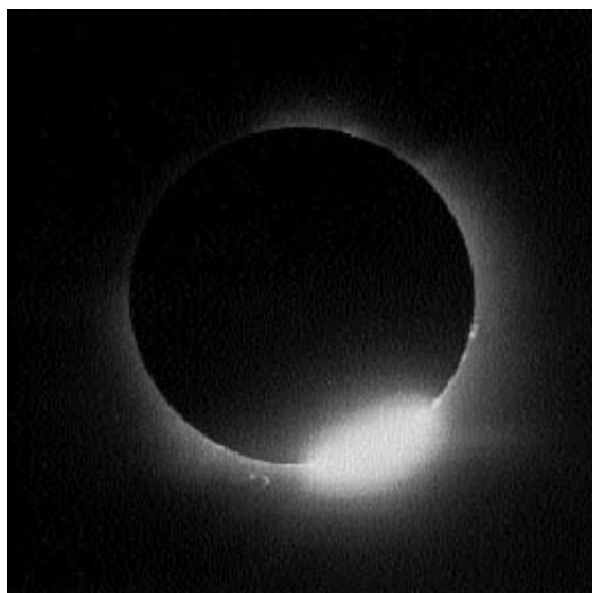
"The heavens declare the glory of God," Psalm 19 tells us. On April 8, 2024, millions of Americans will have an incredible opportunity to see His heavenly glory in a way most of us never have: through a total solar eclipse. On a path running from Texas to South Maine, observers on the ground will see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

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

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

Illustra Media's wonderful DVD *The Privileged Planet*, based on the book by the same name by Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards [\[1\]](#), exposed me to the magnificence of a total solar eclipse. I will never forget the goosebumps at learning that the sun is 400 times farther away than our moon, but it's also 400 times larger. This means that both of these heavenly bodies appear to be the same size to us on Earth. This phenomenal "coincidence" also makes a total eclipse possible.

During an eclipse, ***the heavens declare the glory of God*** by allowing us to see things about the sun we wouldn't be able to observe any other way, beautiful and gloriously resplendent. Just before totality we can see "Baily's Beads." Only seen during an eclipse, bright "beads" appear at the edge of the moon where the sun is shining through lunar valleys, a feature of the moon's rugged landscape. This is followed by the "diamond ring" effect, where the brightness of the sun radiates as a thin band around the circumference of the moon, and the last moments of the sun's visibility explode like a diamond made of pure light. After the minutes of totality, the diamond ring



effect appears again on the opposite side of the moon as the first rays of the sun flare brilliantly. These sky-jewelry phenomena are so outside of mankind's control that witnessing them stirs our spirits (even on YouTube!) with the truth of Romans 1:20—"God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."



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

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

For the few minutes of totality, the naked eye can see the sun's lovely corona (Latin for crown) streaming out from the sun. We can't see the corona except during an eclipse because looking straight at the sun for even a few seconds causes eye damage, and because the sun's ball



of fire overwhelms the (visually) fragile corona. This is another way that an eclipse allows us to see how **the heavens declare the glory of God.**

Astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez noticed details about eclipses that got him excited:

- During a total solar eclipse, the moon is just large enough to block the large photosphere (the big ball of fiery gas), but not so large that it obscures the colorful chromosphere.
- The moon and the sun are two of the roundest measured bodies in the solar system. (Some moons are potato-shaped!) So when the round disk of the moon passes in front of the equally round disk of the sun, the shapes match perfectly.
- He studied all 65 of the moons in our solar system and discovered that ours are the best planet and best moon for studying the sun during an eclipse. Because the moon fits so perfectly over the sun, its blinding light is shielded, providing astronomers with a view of the sun's atmosphere. We can discern finer details in its chromosphere and corona than from any other planet.
- Being able to study the flash spectrum during a total eclipse enables astro-scientists to determine the

chemical makeup of other, distant stars without leaving Earth.

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

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

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

I think this is true of the 2024 eclipse as well. Whether you are fortunate enough to be in the path of the total eclipse like me, or will only get to see 75% of the sun's surface covered by the moon (with eclipse glasses, of course!), this extremely important sky event will be proclaiming to everyone that ***the heavens declare the glory of God***. May it make a lasting impression on us all that teaches us more about God's glory!

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

[2.](#)

<http://cs.astronomy.com/asy/b/astronomy/archive/2014/08/05/25-facts-you-should-know-about-the-august-21-2017-total-solar-eclipse.aspx>

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on Feb. 20, 2024.

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# Sticks and Stones . . .

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

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

- Refuse to subscribe to progressive ideologies? You are hateful.
- Dare to criticize someone's position? You're a bigot.
- Talk about God's plan for marriage as only between one man and one woman? You're homophobic.
- Stand up for common sense in insisting that boys can't become girls and girls can't become boys? You're transphobic.

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

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

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

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

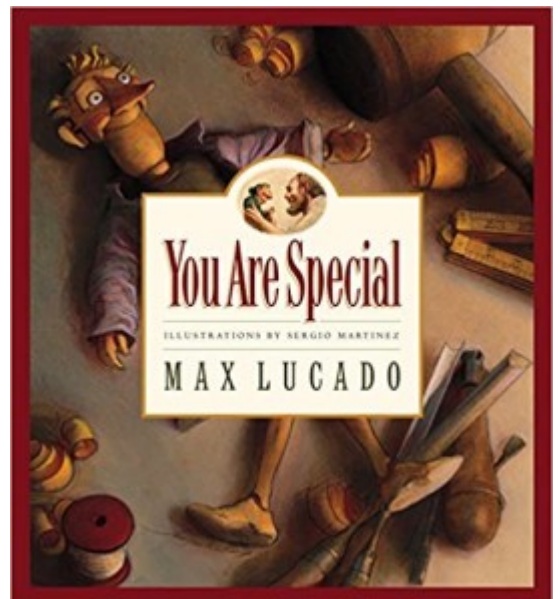
In addition to being called hateful, I’ve received a number of ugly emails declaring me ignorant, foolish, biased, an idiot, and some disgusting sexual slurs as well. In each case, the writers felt free to unleash their hostility and judgmentalism on me, a total stranger.

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

But it doesn’t necessarily have to.

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

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



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

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

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

Punchinello goes to see Eli.

*"Hmm," the maker spoke thoughtfully as he inspected the gray circles. "Looks like you've been given some bad marks."*

*"I didn't mean to, Eli. I really tried hard."*

*"Oh, you don't have to defend yourself to me, child. I don't care what the other Wemmicks think."*

*"You don't?"*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Punchinello thinks, “I think he really means it.”

And then a dot fell to the ground.

For 50 years I have been spending daily time with my Maker, listening to what He says is true about me: I am His beloved child in whom He is well pleased. I am His redeemed daughter, a princess warrior, His workmanship, gifted with supernatural enablings to fulfill the works He gave me to do. My heavenly Father loves me the same way He loves His Son; His Son loves me so much He died for me and rose from the dead to make me His bride.

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

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

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/sticks-and-stones/](https://blogs.bible.org/sticks-and-stones/) on July 23, 2023.

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# Be WHAT?

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

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

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

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

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

Huh?

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

How does one obey a command like that?

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

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

It makes me smile to think about the one answer that all these "Be \_\_\_\_\_" commands have in common:

We can't do it. Jesus wasn't kidding when he said in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in Me and I abide in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me

you can do nothing.”

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

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

### **“Be Not Afraid”**

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

We can’t. But Jesus can.

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

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

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

### **“Be Strong”**

As a polio survivor whose entire left leg was originally

paralyzed and has been very weak my whole life, I can truly appreciate the apparent craziness of this command. It's like my brain telling my frail and lame leg, "Hey! Be strong!" Ain't gonna happen! So why would God give us this command?

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

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

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

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

### **"Be Not Discouraged"**

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

I love this passage in 2 Chronicles 32:7—

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

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

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

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

We can choose to be encouraged over discouragement if we remember that there is a spiritual reality in the heavenly realms that our physical eyes can’t see, another reason to trust God.

### **“Be Anxious for Nothing”**

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

I think Paul had meditated on his friends’ notes of the Sermon

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

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

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

### **"Be Transformed"**

Romans 12:2 says to "be transformed by the renewing of our minds." We can't transform ourselves, we need to give God permission to change us from the inside out. It really starts with recognizing the need to BE transformed in the first place, with the humility that begins to see how much we fall short of Jesus' command to "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

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

By being transformed.

How do we do *that*?

By asking for it. By inviting the Holy Spirit to make us like Jesus and His Father. By responding with repentance when He convicts us of sin and righteousness, which is His job (John 16:8). By "taking off" the old thinking habits and behaviors that are displeasing to God, and "putting on" the new habits and behaviors that align with the heart and character of God—which we learn about as we get to know Him in His word.

And we take off and put on with the Spirit's empowering, not our own efforts.

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

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

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

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

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## Is Comparison Always Bad?

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

"Comparison is the thief of joy."

I've been hearing that for decades.

But is it, always?

Examples of how true that is, most certainly abound.

I recently read my friend Amy's Facebook account of her college experience. A gifted singer, she was a jazz vocalist major at a university known for its excellent music program.

The only problem was that she had a friend and classmate who was so much better than Amy. She used to go home on weekends and bemoan the difference to her parents, asking why *they* couldn't be jazz musicians like her friend's parents. She eventually changed her major to pre-med, which was easier in comparison.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Or, more likely, you can compare your reality to everyone

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

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

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

In a completely different vein, we are also seeing the incredibly sad results of boys comparing themselves to girls and wishing they had a girl's body and a girl's life—and girls convinced their lives would be better and they would be happier and safer in a boy's body.

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

This is heartbreaking.

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

So . . . is comparison *always* bad?

No!

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

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

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

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

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

Hebrews 12:2 tells us to "fix our eyes on Jesus." If we compare ourselves to Him, we will see ourselves as appropriately small, weak, lesser than, and desperately needy of Him. If we fix our eyes on Him, we won't be distracted by comparing ourselves to others and end up feeling either puffed up or put down. If we compare ourselves to Him, we will

experience true humility, which is seeing ourselves as neither too big nor too small, but right-sized.

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

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/is-comparison-always-bad/](https://blogs.bible.org/is-comparison-always-bad/) on May 16, 2023.

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## Trusting God on the Other Side of Bizarre

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

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

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

I continue to believe that this cancer is a form of spiritual warfare, and it was a very personal attack as retaliation for continually speaking out about the goodness of God’s design for sex, gender, and sexuality. According to Ephesians 6:13, the outcome of successful spiritual warfare is to *just stay standing*. (“[W]hen the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to

stand.") I dug in my heels, so to speak, and determined to keep standing in the goodness of God, not allowing the enemy to knock me down. And to keep standing in my trust of His sovereignty, that a good and loving God is in control. As I praised Him for using pain as a sculpting tool to shape me like Jesus, my heart of thanksgiving repelled the enemy, for the Lord abides in the praise of His people (Psalm 22:3). I love the image of the God of light dwelling in the heart of the believer, because darkness cannot stand before light. It has to flee. And so did the enemy, as I thanked and praised God for His lovingkindness to me.

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

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

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

exhausting tears are, and why people overtaken by tears need to be given extra-large doses of grace and compassion.

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

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

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

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

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

*I have been begging God for no cancer in the lymph nodes, but*

*what if He says no? What if my path goes into the radiology unit?*

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

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

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

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

I honestly don't think it's about gaining more information about God or learning more life lessons. I think it's about building my character and perseverance. I think it's about growing my roots deeper in my dependence on Christ and maturing me spiritually, to make me more like Him. That's the

spiritual fruit that the Lord wants to see His people bear, I think.

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

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## Trusting God in the Bizarre

I have tongue cancer. Bizarre, right? I'm not male, nor do I engage in the particularly bad combination of both smoking and drinking, which are the big markers for this nasty invasion. In two weeks I am scheduled for surgery to remove the cancer by cutting out a big chunk of my tongue—which is a particular challenge and sadness for a professional speaker.

One of the things I have discovered is that, even without any drugs, the weight of this diagnosis and the upcoming difficult surgery and recovery has consumed a lot of my mental and emotional energy. Everything in my life has taken a back seat to this crisis.

Let me share some observations from my “Cancer Journey” journal, in no thought-through order because . . . see the above paragraph.

The oral surgeon who biopsied my tongue is a dear believer from church. When he delivered the bad news to me with amazing tenderness and gentleness, he was “Jesus with skin on” to me. I truly sensed the Lord was telling me through my doctor-now-friend that He was allowing this challenge that was going to

be hard, and a lot of work, but He is with me. I was so blessed to be able to freely respond by asking, "Would you please pray for me?" And he did. The first of many, many prayers I have received.

Years ago, when an older friend got breast cancer, I asked her if she struggled with anger at God for letting this bad thing happen to her. She said, "Oh no! God has been so faithful and so good to me all these years of walking with Him, I know that He is allowing this for a reason. I trust Him." And that's why she didn't ask the "Why me?" question, either: living in a fallen world, why NOT her? At that time, I prayed, "Lord, I will continue to ask that You spare me from cancer, but if You don't, I am pre-deciding to respond the way Delores did." So I didn't have to work out my response when the diagnosis came.

My primary care doctor told me a long time ago to stop diagnosing myself; I'm never right. (And not to consult with Dr. Google either.) But that's what I had done concerning the soreness on the side of my tongue that has lingered for months. Two dentists advised me to see an oral surgeon and possibly get it biopsied, but I was so *sure* it couldn't be cancer that I dragged my feet following through. I am fully repenting of "leaning on my own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5) and diagnosing myself. And I now have a fuller understanding of why [self-sufficiency](#) is a sin . . . and I'm repenting of that too.

Early in this cancer journey, Jesus spoke to my heart through Revelation 2:10—"Do not fear what you are about to suffer." I know He was addressing the church in Smyrna with that verse, but He pretty much burned it into MY heart when I read it one morning. He knew that, being a pain weenie, I was going to struggle with fear. I have to keep reminding myself of what to do with my fear: Psalm 53:6 says, "When I am afraid, I will trust in You." And in these days of Advent, I get to be reminded frequently through Christmas music that Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us." I need to trust Him; I need to trust

IN Him; I need to recall Isaiah 43:1-5, where He says, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you." Just like I used to soothe my frightened children when they were small with, "It's OK, it's OK, Mommy's with you."

One night as I prepared for bed and took my evening medication and supplements, I realized that taking oral pain meds post-surgery is going to be a challenge with a crippled tongue. Then I realized that I am going to be losing a body part, and I need to grieve that. The next morning, on the phone with our church's women's pastor who was checking on me, I shared about this realization. As she prayed for me, choked up with compassion, my tears started to fall. The moment I hung up, great heaving sobs overtook me. And I grieved.

(As hard as it was on me, losing a body part because of disease, I also cried out of anger that the enemy has deceived so many people, especially young people, into thinking that they would be happy if they would just have perfectly healthy body parts amputated. I cried out of compassion for their inevitable double grief of not only losing a *healthy* body part, but the eventual realization that they were lied to about what would fix everything in their thoughts and feelings. And that evil spirits laugh at their pain.)

Instead of a women's Christmas Coffee at church, we were blessed to have 25 hostesses open their homes in multiple cities and multiple zip codes for 25 teachers to share the same basic message that each of us made our own. In my final point, about abiding in Christ, I was able to hold up an IV bag and tubing to illustrate what abiding is like: Jesus said He is the vine, we are the branches. Our job as branches is to stay connected so His "supernatural sap" can flow into us. Just like when we're hooked up to an IV, our job is to stay connected. I asked my hostess's husband to record that part of my message as well as my application about abiding in Christ as I wrestle with this cancer. I was able to edit it down to 6 minutes and post it on Facebook with a request for prayer.

<https://www.facebook.com/559034244/videos/703017111419005/>

Now on my own Facebook feed, I see a very limited number of people's posts. But somehow (cue God to show up) my post made it to hundreds of people's feeds, and 400+ comments and over 3600 views of the video later, I am being prayed for—a LOT! Thank You Lord!

And I need the prayers. I think the cancer is spiritual warfare that God is allowing for His glory and my good. And for other people's good as well, though I may never see it on this side of eternity. One of my friends said, "You are outspoken and the enemy wants to silence you. What better way than to go after your tongue?" On top of the attack on my body, I've also wrestled at times with fear about the pain. I think it's a spirit of fear. (I've been here before: see my blog post "[I'm Scared, Lord.](#)")

But God . . . because He loves me . . . just gave me a connection on Facebook with a young lady who is not only recovering from the same tongue cancer surgery, it was done by the same surgeon as mine! She has encouraged and reassured me about the pain management. We look forward to meeting face to face soon. That is a Christmas gift from the Lord, and it's part of His answer to the prayers of many people.

I have been in this place of experiencing peace from the prayers of God's people before. My last trip to Belarus, before I lost the ability to walk, I posted a request for people to pray daily for me for "stair grace." There are few elevators in Belarus, and the building where we were staying and teaching had two flights of stairs I had to climb several times a day. I asked for 10 people to pray, and 70 promised they would support me through prayer. And boy did they ever. It was amazing how easy it was to go up and down stairs for almost two weeks.

Until the last day, on my last stair climb, when I sensed the

Lord telling me, “I have been answering your friends’ prayers for stair grace all this trip. Now I’m going to remove the grace so you can experience what it would have been like without the enabling grace.” And. It. Was. HARD!!! I was sore, I was out of breath, my polio leg yelled at me. So I know the huge difference prayer makes, and I am so grateful for the prayer support I’ve already received. I am desperate for the prayers of God’s people!

[The story continues](#) . . . in God’s loving hands. . . as I continue to trust Him in the bizarre.

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## Learning to Lean Hard—AGAIN

Walking with God. The scriptures talk a lot about how we walk, which is biblical language for how we live. But walking itself, beyond the analogies, has a special meaning to me.

As an infant, polio paralyzed me from the waist down, but little baby helper nerve cells sprouted up and gave me some use of my leg back. I needed a full-length brace to be able to stand and walk at all for my first years. And every step of my life has been a rather noticeable limp. So to me, walking = limping.

So when I hear words of wisdom like, “Don’t trust any leader who doesn’t walk with a limp” (meaning, a leader who hides their brokenness and need for Jesus), I’m all over that. I’ve

got that “walk with a limp” thing DOWN!

My limp was the cause of great shame for decades. I have always avoided looking in mirrors and plate-glass windows, anything that would remind me of what I look like when I walk. I didn't need reflective surfaces, though, to be reminded of my limp; the stares of people, especially children, did that, making my soul burn with embarrassment. Every single day.

And when I was 35, a physical therapist instructed me to start using a cane. It helped with stability and relieving some of the stress on my polio leg. As long as I was going to use a cane, I thought, I may as well *enjoy* it by using fun and pretty canes (thanks to [FashionableCanes.com!](http://FashionableCanes.com))

And then bad arthritis hit both my hips, and the pain escalated to the point where I literally could not walk or stand for a year and a half. My mobility scooter became my legs 24/7.

I wasn't limping anymore. Because I wasn't walking anymore, with or without a cane.

By God's grace, particularly through Medicare, once I hit 65 I was able to have both hips replaced. The arthritis went into the medical waste bin along with my natural hip joints. I have had no pain since 2018, a daily source of gratitude for me.

And the ability to walk and stand was restored to me. What a blessing!

One day I realized that yes, I was limping again, because *I was walking again!* That put a whole new spin on seeing limping as a *privilege!*

God has used this journey to teach me a number of lessons. (Such as [“Lessons From a Hospital Bed”](#)) I recently learned a new one.

I often advise people to “lean hard on Jesus” regardless of

the reason, but especially in times of trial and crisis. Sometimes they wonder, What does that look like? Legit question!

And one day as I was walking across my kitchen, leaning hard onto my cane, the Holy Spirit nudged me. As usual, without thinking about it, I was depending on my cane to provide stability and assistance and relieve some of the weight and pressure on my increasingly-weak leg. Then, when my cane struck some water on the floor I didn't see, it slid as if I had been walking on ice. By God's grace I did not fall, though I could easily have done so—and falling is baaaaaad for people with artificial hips. I suddenly had a new appreciation for how much I need my cane. And I need it to be firmly planted on non-slippery surfaces.

Just like I need Jesus, who is far more secure than my cane on a dry surface.

I need to lean hard on Him in grateful dependence, trusting Him to empower me, lead me, grow me, change me, provide for me. Just like I do my cane, a physical reminder of what “leaning hard” looks like.

But there was another lesson coming.

I don't need my cane to walk like I used to need my scooter to move. But when I walk without it, my wonky polio limp is not only there, it's even wonkier than it was before because my new hips changed my gait. Sometimes when I need to carry two items from one room into another, I hook my cane into the crook of my elbow so I have both hands free to carry stuff. When I do that, my walk—my limp—is almost bizarre.

It is not lost on me that when I hook my cane onto my arm like a fashion accessory instead of leaning hard on it, my walk is wonky. And unnatural. And when I depend on myself, walking in self-sufficiency instead of leaning hard on Jesus, the walk of my life is at least equally wonky. And unnatural. And

unattractive.

So yes, my cane is like Jesus. He wants us to lean hard on Him, to depend on Him, instead of treating Him like a fashion accessory. He actually said, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for *apart from Me you can do nothing.*" (John 15:5, emphasis mine)

The other day, as I entered the living room with both hands full, my husband said, "I would have been happy to help; you don't need to wear Jesus on your arm."

I laughed . . . and then the next time, instead of leaning on self-sufficiency I asked for help. Because leaning on Jesus means, among many other things, that He helps me spurn self-sufficiency and ask for help.

The lessons continue.

(I wrote a 2016 blog post ([Leaning Hard](#)) about my first set of lessons in learning to lean hard, which I had forgotten about until I went to upload this one. I will clearly need to keep learning the lesson.)

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/learning-to-lean-hard-again/](https://blogs.bible.org/learning-to-lean-hard-again/) on November 16, 2022.

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## Vaccination Hate

Many of us are familiar with the destructive effects of the Covid pandemic: besides death and long-term weaknesses, we

have seen irrecoverable economic disasters, especially to small businesses; children who will never recover from gaps in their academic and social development; and the fear-crippled churchgoers who have yet to set foot in a church building since March 2020—just to name a few.

But recently I was horrified to hear my friend Dr. John West, Vice President of the Seattle-based Discovery Institute and Managing Director of the Institute's Center for Science and Culture, deliver one of the most disturbingly chilling messages I've yet heard on the effects of Covid. He walked through examples of insult after indignity after contemptuous phrase directed at people who chose not to receive the Covid vaccine.

Pre-pandemic, the right to make one's own medical decisions was considered a basic human right. Within just a few months of March 2020 that right evaporated, and the culture quickly divided into emotion-laden "us vs. them" positions.

"The issue here," John has written\*, "is not whether you favor the COVID vaccines or think they are effective or moral. The issue is how we treat sincere and decent people who make different medical choices than we would."

*[W]e are witnessing a mass campaign to dehumanize an entire class of people because of their medical choices. Fellow citizens who choose not to be vaccinated are being branded ["narcissists," "child abusers" and "parasites."](#) They are accused of ["killing off their fellow citizens."](#) They are denounced as ["dangerous"](#) people "from poorer or less educated parts of society." They are described as ["a leech on everyone else's participation in making America healthy and safe."](#) A sitting federal judge has declared that "the vast majority of unvaccinated adults" are either (take your pick) "uninformed and irrational" or ["selfish and unpatriotic."](#) A member of a famous rock band has labeled them ["an enemy"](#) of society with a "delusional, evil idea." The Prime Minister of Canada has*

called them “misogynistic and racist.” A New York newspaper derides them as low in IQ. The Republican governor of Alabama urges that “it’s time to start blaming the unvaccinated folks,” accusing them of embracing “a horrible lifestyle.” A former speechwriter for George W. Bush has compared the unvaccinated to cancer, calling them “the malignant minority.” The president of France claims the unvaccinated are not even citizens.

The insults go both ways. Those suspicious of the vaccine and vaccine mandates have contemptuously castigated the vaxxed as “sheep” and “sheeple,” “murderers,” and even “delusional unfit brainwashed parents” of those who had their children vaccinated.

I am struck—feeling almost like a literal slap across the face—by how this situation is the 2022 iteration of Romans 14, where Paul addressed the mutual judging and condemning of people taking opposing positions concerning eating and drinking. Swapping out details from the daily news feed, we might paraphrase Romans 14:3 as

*The one who [receives the vaccine] must not despise the one who does not, and the one who [chooses not to get the vaccine] must not judge the one who [has been vaccinated], for God has accepted him.*

In verse 5, Paul gives room for people to come to different positions on the subject of “debatable things”:

*Each must be fully convinced in his own mind.*

What was missing in the church at Rome is what’s missing in much of our culture concerning the vaccine issue: love.

A grace-filled spirit that puts the value of people above being right.

A willingness to allow others to believe differently than we do because they are precious image-bearers who deserve respect and dignity, even in the midst of disagreement.

*15 For if your brother or sister is distressed because of [your beliefs about vaccines], you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy by your [vaccination position] someone for whom Christ died.*

But it's not just about what people believe. John continues:

*This kind of rhetoric against others has cruel real-world consequences. Unvaccinated people are losing their jobs and their livelihoods, often by government decree. They are being denied unemployment benefits – benefits they paid for through their payroll taxes. Doctors have announced that they will not serve unvaccinated people, and unvaccinated patients are being denied life-saving organ transplants. Unvaccinated people are being denied access to marriage licenses. Judges have tried to deny child visitation rights to parents who are not vaccinated. In many jurisdictions, healthy unvaccinated people are now banned from stores, theaters, and sporting events. In Canada, one province even authorized grocery stores to ban the unvaccinated, only relenting after a massive backlash. Just ponder for a moment the type of mindset someone must have to authorize the denial of access to food.*

These policies, driven by unveiled contempt, are the essence of what is unloving. Unkind. Mean. Hateful! And completely ignoring God.

It's not just love that is missing—it is awareness that God is sovereign. He is in control. And both policy-makers and individuals posting comments on social media will answer to Him for how we treated people He loves, people He made, people Jesus died for.

Regardless of anyone's beliefs or practices about vaccination, He is still God and we are not. He is bigger than Covid and vaccines. Maybe some reminders of His blessed sovereignty will help . . .

Who announces the end from the beginning and reveals beforehand what has not yet occurred; who says, 'My plan will be realized, I will accomplish what I desire.' [Isaiah 46:10]

All the inhabitants of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he wishes with the army of heaven and with those who inhabit the earth. No one slaps his hand and says to him, 'What have you done?' [Daniel 4:35]

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. [Genesis 50:20]

Indeed, the Lord of Heaven's Armies has a plan, and who can possibly frustrate it? His hand is ready to strike, and who can possibly stop it? [Isaiah 14:27]

The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. [Psalm 24:1]

\*<https://evolutionnews.org/2022/01/the-rise-of-totalitarian-science-2022-edition/>

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/vaccination-hate/](https://blogs.bible.org/vaccination-hate/) on Aug. 16, 2022.

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## Salt and Light Online

*During the pandemic, I was honored to be asked to address a student leadership conference for a Christian school in the*

*Philippines via Zoom. Looking over my notes, there isn't much here that doesn't apply to ALL of us with any kind of online connection.*

In order to follow Jesus' call to be salt and light, and applying it to online life, I'd like to take a look at several dangers of the dark side of online life, as well as suggest ways to be wise in the use of this technology.

### **The Comparison Trap**

I don't think anything has fueled the temptation to compare ourselves to others as much as social media. There is a wise saying that "Comparison is the thief of joy."

This is where our feelings go when we're caught in the comparison trap: to envy. To depression and anxiety.

**A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot. (Proverbs 14:30)**

**Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. (Proverbs 12:25)**

The opposite of comparing is choosing contentment.

**Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)**

**Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (1 Timothy 6:6-8)**

And one of the best ways to choose contentment is to train yourself to practice gratitude. Give thanks for what the Lord has allowed for you.

**Whatever happens, give thanks, because it is God's will in**

Christ Jesus that you do this. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

## **Dangers of Social Media Apps**

One of the worst is Tiktok.

A 17 year old girl wrote: "The only thing worse that happened to me besides Tiktok was my family members dying . . . . I would spend countless hours crying in my bedroom repeatedly watching Tiktok, telling myself I wasn't good enough."

Another girl told of starving herself to look like the people Tiktok decides are acceptable.

Tiktok destroys people's self-esteem. Millions of kids try to learn the dances to fit in or feel accepted.

There is a strong pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia presence, causing lots of girls to develop eating disorders because adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure.

The message on so many of the apps for girls is: If you want to be seen, heard, loved—show off your body. No one is valuing you for your heart or your mind or your passions, just your appearance. Just your body.

This is so dangerous! It's a lie that a girl's worth is in how pretty she is or how thin she is or how sexy she is.

A person's worth is set by Jesus, who was willing to pay for each one of us with His life. He says, "I made you in My image, and that makes you infinitely valuable to begin with. Then I died for you, which proves you are infinitely valuable." THAT is true worth. It's set by Jesus Himself.

Many of the apps are also dangerous because sexual predators use them to trick kids and lure them into meeting, where bad things happen. So many victims of sex trafficking are drawn in on social media.

Another way social media is dangerous is because there's where so much cyber-bullying happens.

If you see someone being bullied, ask the Lord for help and be brave. Speak up and say, "That's not okay." There is power in just one voice! And report it-to whatever authorities have to do with how you know the person, such as school, or church, or the neighborhood. Keep inviting Jesus into the situation and ask for supernatural help.

Another problem with Tiktok in particular is a different kind of danger, concerning privacy and security.

One expert said, "Anytime Amazon, major banks, and the Department of Defense ban employees from using an app for security issues, it's time for everyone to uninstall the app."

You need to know that NOTHING you put on social media is private.

### **Other Emotional Dangers**

The more time you spend online, the greater your risk of feeling isolated and taken to a dark place emotionally. Because of the pandemic's lockdown, depression and loneliness are at an all-time high.

Scrolling your social media feeds contributes to feeling left out.

Too much social media leads to disconnection and loneliness, and feelings of social isolation. Too much social media makes us feel inadequate because of the comparison thing.

A 2018 study published in the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology revealed that those who limited their social media exposure to 30 minutes a day, reported that their depression lifted and their loneliness improved. Social media activist [Collin Karchner](#), founder of the "Save the Kids" movement, kept hearing from U.S. students that they reported feeling better

immediately after deleting their social media apps!

Another aspect of spending too much time online is that it can cause difficulty engaging in conversations in real life. Which of course fuels the loneliness further.

## **Purity**

Probably the MAJOR pitfall of the Internet is pornography.

The fastest growing consumer of porn is girls 15-30. I found one statistic that 70% of guys and 50% of girls struggle with a porn problem. I think it's higher than that.

I understand that when apologist and speaker Josh McDowell offered a one-month discipleship program for Christian student leader, he learned that 100% of both guys and girls confessed to problems with porn.

Brain chemicals are released when viewing pornography and during sexual experiences. These brain chemicals are intended to bond husband and wife like emotional superglue, but when people use porn, they bond to the porn instead of an actual person.

This is a matter of spiritual warfare. The enemy of our souls is taking captive millions of Christians through pornography, then beating them up with shame and guilt.

I plead with you, install a filter or an accountability program on your phone to help you stand against this attack on your purity.

And please, don't take pictures of your bodies. And most certainly do not send any pictures of body parts to other people!

**You were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:20)**

The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:4)

Your body was bought by Jesus and it belongs to Him. It's not okay to give it away, even in pictures, to anyone except the person you have married.

### **What would being WISE look like, then?**

First, recognize that this is a huge issue, especially in the Philippines. People in your country spend more time online than any other country in the world-almost 11 hours a day. You also spend more time on social media, over four hours, than any other country-twice the worldwide average.

It would be wise to choose to unplug yourselves so you can replenish your mental, emotional, and spiritual resources.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

There has to be a choice to deny ourselves and say NO to the phone as a way of saying YES to Jesus.

Think about all the ways you stay tethered to your phone so it controls you.

Get a real alarm clock and watch so you're not dependent on your phone to tell you what time it is.

At night, recharge your phone in another room so your sleep won't be disturbed by the sound and light of incoming messages and notifications.

Don't post on social media when you're emotional. Don't treat social media like a diary. Then you won't regret emotional posting that embarrasses you later.

If you're already feeling down, don't scroll social media. It will make you feel even worse.

To be emotionally healthy, let yourself feel your feelings instead of distracting yourself by scrolling.

Put your phone down and be 100% mindful of what's happening in your life at that moment.

The blue light from screens decreases your melatonin levels, which leads to sleep problems. Turn off your screen an hour before bed to help yourself sleep better.

## **Love One Another**

Before you post anything, ask:

- Is it true?
- Is it helpful?
- Is it kind?
- Will it cause drama?
- Am I posting this for the right reason?
- Would my grandmother want to see this?
- Is it mine to share?
- Would I say this or share this in real life?
- Does this glorify God?

Can you see how passing your post through the filter of these insightful questions would be loving?

## **The Big Picture**

There are two verses that strike me as especially appropriate to this issue:

**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)**

**So then, whether you eat or drink OR WHATEVER YOU DO, do it all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)**

If that is the question we ask: “Will this bring glory to God?” we will find ourselves being loving, kind, respectful Christ-followers who are bringing salt and light into the dark and corrupt world of the internet.

And we will earn the Lord’s accolade: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/salt-and-light-online/](https://blogs.bible.org/salt-and-light-online/) on May 17, 2022.