

Living With a Sense of Urgency

"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Psalm 90:12

I asked my dear friend Caren Austen to write about the life-upending diagnosis that, in a single moment of time, changed absolutely everything about her life.

Cerebral atrophy.

That was the diagnosis resulting from a recent MRI. Deterioration of the brain.

After judiciously researching the diagnosis, a consultation with a friend in the medical field confirmed the most likely cause that my brain is shrinking: Alzheimer's. A singular moment with horrific implications.



At 66, I was stung as the future I had anticipated seemed to be snatched away. The time I likely would not have with my children and grandchildren. I didn't feel frightened as much as sad. I know that God is Lord of my past, present, and future, so I was secure in His will and His care.

Still, I had looked forward to more time on playgrounds, more snuggles with my youngest grandchild, my only grandson, Liam, who is, at eight, now my only snuggle bug. I had anticipated

more time. Time reading books by flashlight in tents made of blankets strung over tables. More tea parties with Katrin, my tomboy who, at 11, still loves to set up fancy teas for her "Glamma." I longed to continue sending and receiving just-home-from-school and late-night texts about their days. I wanted to cook again with my budding chef, Brigid, and see how she, now a teenager, grows – where her talents and interests take her. I wanted to hang out again with Murren, riding around in the old rusty farm truck she loves. I wanted to hear more of her music video analyses. I wanted to see this young woman on the cusp of adulthood mature and launch into the world on her own. I wanted to be fully present for proms, graduations, weddings, and more babies.

I had begun two books and had fallen into the writers' bane of procrastination. Now, I wondered if I would have time, if I would still remember all I needed to complete them. Suddenly, I craved time. I wanted more. I was frustrated by the mundane necessities that took me away from the activities that screamed for my time *now*.

I had only recently experienced God's miraculous healing after decades of dealing with a debilitating mental illness that had stolen so much time. Now, with my newfound peace, freedom, and joy, I wanted to live. I wanted to walk in that freedom. I longed to wake up with delight at each new morning. I wanted to share my freedom and my healing. Now, I wondered: would there be time?

I began to live with a sense of urgency. My life became laser focused. Not on a bucket list of places to go or experiences to enjoy. Instead, I felt driven to create a legacy for my children, my grandchildren, and for my friends and others who had lived through some of the same struggles I had. Thoughts and ideas of just how to do that occupied my mind during the day when I was not at work, in the evening when I sat alone at home, and at night when I lay in bed and sleep would not come.

My priorities changed. I didn't want to spend my money or my time on material objects or activity that would not have a lasting impact for the people I loved. I wanted to conserve my time, energy, and resources for those activities that would leave an eternal imprint on those I cared for. I began to spend even more time in prayer for those I love, especially my children and grandchildren. I began to formulate in my mind the letters I would write to each one. I began to search the Scriptures for the verses that would offer them guidance, as well as those that were precious to me, so they could get to know me better even when my mind could no longer communicate my heart.

I spent time rededicating my two daughters to God and praying my own dedication of my children's children to Him. I told God over and over, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," longing for assurance that even when my mind was gone, I had done all I could to leave behind a legacy that would point them to the Lord I love. A legacy that would ensure we would all be reunited one day in a world that shines with the light of the glory of God when my renewed mind would know and recognize them.

I didn't worry too much about what my own surroundings would be as I declined. I thought I would most likely be squirreled away in a nursing home that took in those with few resources. Separated by hundreds of miles from my family, I knew my local friends would come to check on me. I felt sorrow at the thought of loneliness, isolation, and limited activities, and I wondered how it would feel to live the confusion of time and place I had witnessed with my mother. I reflected on the occasions she talked to me about me, as though I were a stranger. I grieved for the time that would come when I would not recognize my own daughters whom I love, the precious gifts of God I had carried, given birth to, and reared. I wept at the thought of losing the sweet memories of mothering them and the joys that were shared only between the three of us.

As I grieved the future I thought I would not see, I began to concentrate more on what I could leave behind. As I only shared this preliminary diagnosis with a few of my closest confidants, they helped me brainstorm ideas on how to share my legacy: passages of Scripture, poetry, music, videos, letters, photo albums, etc. would be the means I would use to reach out into the future to continue influencing those God had entrusted me with and whom I would leave behind. I experienced relief, pleasure, and even hope at each new idea that would allow me to continue to have influence and share my love and myself even when the part of me that is "me" was gone.

That was how I began living a life of urgency. I awoke daily with a purpose of doing something specific to leave a legacy, a trail those I loved could follow behind me to a growing and loving relationship with God.

Then, in another singularly memorable moment, my life shifted again.

A knowledgeable neurologist examined my MRI. In view of my heart-wrenching diagnosis he seemed crazily nonplussed. But he said that, while the MRI did show evidence of mild cerebral atrophy, it was exactly what he would expect of someone who was 66 years old, and it was certainly nothing of concern. *What??!!!* In one moment he erased my fears and sent me into near spasms of joy.

Since that sweet reprieve, I must admit, I have slipped a bit in my sense of urgency. The desire to sort through stacks of books that clutter my new apartment, the necessity of making a living, the need for rest after a day of work, and countless everyday nuisances crowd my life and scream for attention. However, the experience has changed me. I no longer take my days, my hours for granted. My desire to leave a legacy of worth has changed the way I pray and spend my time. I continue to plan ways to ensure that my faith will live beyond me. I pray that God will show Himself through me in my little sphere

of influence. I have not lessened the prayers for my family, especially my daughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren. God put *me*, with all my flaws, talents, life experiences, joys, sorrows, and foibles onto this earth for a reason—a purpose that He designed *me* to fulfill. I seek to savor each moment God gives me to love and live for Him. That is my sense of urgency. It is my prayer every morning before my feet hit the floor that this day my life will not be spent in my own pursuits but will be only a conduit for Him to touch those He places in my path.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/living-with-a-sense-of-urgency/ on August 17, 2021.

How Should We Think About Pride Month?

How should Christ-followers think about Pride Month?

Well, first, in case you are not aware, Pride Month is a time of highlighting and celebrating everything LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender). You might have seen a few more letters tacked on—QQIAA (queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, ally).

It's hard NOT to notice it's Pride Month when rainbows suddenly appear on all kinds of products and logos. Many cities have Pride marches, much of which is not safe to broadcast on the evening news because the behavior in these parades is definitely not family-friendly.

How should believers think about it all?

We need to pass our thoughts and judgments through the filter of God's word. What does God think about Pride Month?

First, every single person who is part of the LGBT community is a precious soul that He made in His image, for whom Christ died. And very few who identify as LGBT have not sustained some sort of soul wound, which makes this promise in Isaiah 42:3 even dearer: "A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice." So in terms of the individuals who participate in Pride Month, God knows each of them by name and He loves them, tenderly and great compassion.

God understands the heart cry of those in the LGBT community to belong, to be included and not excluded, to be visible and heard and understood and cared for, to hear that they matter. These are the heart desires of those who align under the Pride flag.

And God gets it, because those are legitimate desires that we all have because we're born that way. God made us that way, all of us, to long to be loved, accepted, and affirmed.

It means the world to those who have found community under the LGBT banner because they were "different," they were "other," so they often felt marginalized and ostracized from their families or school communities or religious communities.

So Pride Month is a call to love the people who celebrate it.

But that's not all.

God has also revealed His design and intention for human sexuality and gender identity, both in the Old Testament and, in the words of Jesus Himself, in the New Testament: "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave

his father and mother be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?” (Matthew 19:4-5)

God made human beings male and female. It really is that simple, regardless of how complicated people’s feelings can be about gender.

And He intended sexual expression to be limited to husband and wife within marriage, which we see by the Bible’s 44 references to sexual immorality (sex outside of marriage) as sin.

In view of the LGBT community’s desire for not just legitimacy but commendation in any and all sexual expression, we need to remember that God specifically forbade same-sex behavior in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” In the New Testament, the apostle Paul expands this prohibition to include lesbianism in Romans 1:24-27:

Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. . . . Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men . . .

So how should Christians think about Pride Month? With discernment.

- Remembering that the people involved are precious to God, but the identity they are choosing falls short of the glory of God (the Bible’s definition of sin, Romans 3:23) because it does not submit to and align with God’s intention for human sexuality.
- Not being fooled by the slogan “Love is love,” which is a slick gloss over the false declaration that calling

something “love” automatically validates it. How about brother-sister incestuous “love”? How about adulterous “love”? How about polyamory (multiple partners in a relationship) “love”? And, especially since we have already started down the slippery slope, how long before there is a call to extend the sexual underpinnings of “love is love” to children and animals?

- Comparing one’s view of all things LGBT to God’s word. Those who identify as an Ally should ask themselves why they want to support behavior and an identity God calls sin.
- Taking seriously the sin of pride, holding two important ideas as equally important: Philippians 3:19 says those who “are proud of what they should be ashamed of” (such as those exhibiting their broken sexuality in Pride parades) are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” But Proverbs 16:5 warns, “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD.” So every single one of us needs to confess our sin of pride, of comparing ourselves to anyone else so we feel we are better than others. In fact, seeing the Pride flag during Pride Month would make a great reminder to examine ourselves to look for a prideful, judge-y heart, to confess it as sin and repent.

Many of those who have come out of homosexuality are deeply grieved by Pride Month because they know it encourages hurting, lonely, wounded people to try to find life where it can never be found. They know the truth of Jeremiah 2:13, where God says,

“For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me— the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!”

How should a Christian think about Pride Month? With compassion and prayer for those caught in it, that they will

turn to Jesus as the fountain of living water. And with humility for ourselves, to repent of any pride that comes from comparing ourselves to those waving rainbow flags. As Billy Graham said, “Never take credit for not falling into a temptation that never tempted you in the first place.”

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/how-should-we-think-about-pride-month/ on June 15, 2021.

The Commencement Address I Actually Got to Give

In 2014, I wrote a blog post [The Commencement Address I'll Never Get to Give](#).

Then I was deeply honored to be asked to address the eight graduating seniors of the Richardson Home School Association, where my husband and I have been teaching. He's the high school science teacher and I am his admin, I teach cursive handwriting to younger kids, and together we teach “Building Confident Christians,” a faith-building year of worldview and apologetics.

I had already written my address as a blog post, but I tweaked it some, coming in at a very-short-for-me nine minutes (because ain't nobody goes to graduation for the commencement address, right?):

We've taught all eight of you, and I love you! Congratulations! You made it to the cap-and-gown stage. Not without a lot of help and prodding and prayers and frustration from your parents though, right? Thank them. There's not a

single thing you are or do or have that they didn't have a part in. Thank them! I mean, right now! Stand up, wave and say thank you! (I'll wait . . .!)

You've just finished many years of schooling, and along the way you may have picked up some hooey from the surrounding culture about how wonderful and special you are because of some well-meaning self-esteem messaging. You may have thrown away dozens of ribbons or trophies you received just for showing up.[{1}](#)

Those days are over, because that was never real life. Self-esteem and self-confidence are only gained one way, the hard way: working hard to meet a challenge and not give up until you succeed. You earn self-confidence by doing, not by reciting platitudes in a mirror.

I'd like to put on a life-coach hat for a minute and make some suggestions for your post-high-school life.

Most of you just finished Dr. Bohlin's and my class, Building Confident Christians. We had you do a lot of reading for that class. I want to encourage you to read something else.

If you haven't read Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, read it. It's a classic of how to understand people and how they like to be treated. The reason it's so true is that the book fleshes out the second great commandment, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

For example, when you see a service person, like a waitstaff or toll booth attendant, call him or her by name. One's name is the sweetest sound on earth to each person, and service personnel are often treated as if they were invisible. Using someone's name says, "You are not invisible to me, and I honor you for your service." Prospective employees and spouses have been known to disqualify themselves because of the way they treated people with disrespect or contempt when out in public.

Everyone has an invisible tattoo on their forehead that says, "Please encourage me." And most people have an invisible speech bubble over their heads that says, "Do I matter? Please show me I matter." Every single person you will ever meet is infinitely valuable as the handcrafted masterpiece of the Creator God, and they deserve to be honored and respected simply because God made them and He loves them.

Some final pithy words to the wise. . .

Listen to your body. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, and it will tell you what it needs. Especially listen to your body when it tells you it needs sleep, and green vegetables.

Learn to recognize the nudges of the Holy Spirit, and follow them.

Pray for your future spouse. Assume that you don't know who they are right now, statistically speaking. He or she is out there somewhere. Your prayers WILL make a difference. (Afterwards, you can ask Dr. Bohlin and me about what that means.[{2}](#))

Don't believe everything you think. You swim in the polluted waters of a culture that has rejected God and biblical values, and some of those ideas and thoughts have crept into your mind, even though you weren't aware of it.

Plus, Satan and the demons are real, and you live on the battlefield of unrelenting spiritual warfare. You shouldn't believe everything you think because one of the enemy's favorite tactics is to whisper in our ears in first person, so we think these ideas are our own. Such as,

- "It's okay, I can do this, no one will know."
- "I deserve to get my way."
- "I am such a loser."
- "Well, I'm better than HER/HIM."

Whether we're talking about the cultural water you swim in, or the thoughts in your head that come from spiritual warfare, pass everything through the filter of God's word. Which means you need to read and study it! Every day!

If you wonder if you should be doing something, you probably shouldn't. If the thought, 'Should I be doing this?' even enters your head, it's an alarm. Invite the Lord into that question!

A few minutes ago I asked you to stand up and thank your parents. One of the most important habits you can ever form is gratitude. Especially toward God. He is continually blessing you with everything from the ability to draw your next breath, to your ability to remember your name, to your ability to walk or drive or think or talk or get a job or more education.

Get in the habit of thanking Him for all those things. Regularly stop and ask yourself, "What would I really miss tomorrow if I didn't give thanks for it today?"-and then thank the Lord for it. Right where you're sitting-"Oh Lord! Thank You for cushioned seats! Thank You for 24/7 electricity! Thank You for air conditioning! Thank You for clean drinking water! Thank You for paved roads, and garbage pickup! There are so many things we would really miss tomorrow if we didn't give thanks for them today.

A grateful heart is not a complaining heart.

A grateful heart is not a critical heart.

A grateful heart is not an entitled heart.

Believe me, it will make you a much better person to live with, or work with, or play with, or just be with.



One of the best ways to get in the habit of saying “Thank You, Lord” is a gratitude journal. It’s a wonderful discipline to record three things every day (or night) where you saw God being gracious and loving and kind to you, or to someone else.

I want to make that easy for you, so I have a gift for each of you, a personalized gratitude journal. I challenge you, over the next few years, fill it up, one day at a time. What a magnificent form of worship that would be!

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and give you peace. Your real education is about to begin.

1. After the graduation, I was humbled and grateful for the comments of the mother of an intellectual disabled child who pointed out that her daughter loves receiving ribbons and trophies for just showing up. It makes her feel valued and loved. I’m thankful for this perspective and I regret that my words caused needless pain.

2. Soon after I trusted Christ in college, I started praying every day for my future husband. Once I met Ray and realized he was the one God had chosen for me, we discovered that he had started having a daily quiet time of Bible study and prayer the same week I started to pray.

What Does It Mean To Live

With an Eternal Perspective?

Sue Bohlin, who has been working on developing an eternal perspective for decades, provides some examples of how to do that.

Years ago, after spending his whole life on the mission field, a career missionary made his final trip home on a passenger ship. One of the other people on his sailing was a celebrity, and as the ship made its way into the harbor, all those on board beheld a huge throng of well wishers at the pier with signs and instruments to celebrate the famous person's return.

The missionary stood at the railing, watching wistfully, knowing that not a soul was there for him. He said, "Lord, I've served You my whole life. Look at all the recognition and revelry for that famous person, and there's nobody here for me. It hurts, Lord."

He heard the still, small voice say, "You're not home yet, son."

I love this story that helps me keep in mind the big picture that includes the eternal, unseen realm, and the long picture that extends into the forever that awaits on the other side of death.

But how do we *get* an eternal perspective?

Seeing the Unseen

As I've grown older, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 has become my new life verse:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For

the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

We have to work at seeing the unseen and eternal. We do that with the eyes of our hearts. We do that by training ourselves to view everything through the lens of God's word.

I've been working at developing an eternal perspective for years. For me, it's about connecting the dots between earthly things and heavenly things.

I look at earthly things and wonder, "How does this connect to the spirit realm? How does this connect to what is unseen and eternal?" (For examples, look at [Glorious Morning Glories](#), [Back Infections and Heart Infections](#), [Cruise Ships, Roller Coasters and Attitudes](#), and [Blowing Past Greatness](#).)

Jesus' parables are the world's best examples of using the physical to provide understanding of the eternal. He was always connecting the dots between the things He was surrounded by—different types of soil, lost coins and sheep and sons, a wedding banquet—and explaining how these things related to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Another aspect of seeing the unseen is staying aware of the fact that we live in a permanent battle zone of spiritual warfare. We have an enemy who hates us because He hates God, and is continually attacking us with lies and deceptions. When we forget that we live in a culture barraging us with anti-God anti-truth, it's like going out in our underwear, needlessly exposing ourselves. Living with an eternal perspective means staying vigilant, donning our spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:10-18) and using it to fight back against the lies of the enemy.

One of the most important prayers we can ask is, "Lord, help me see Your hand at work"—and then intentionally looking for it. For years I have kept a "God Sightings" Journal where I record evidence of God intervening in my life and the lives of

others I have seen. I love to ask my friends and mentees, “Do you have any God Sightings to share?” to help them identify the hand of God in their lives.

One final aspect of seeing the unseen is to remind ourselves that everything we can see, is going away. Everything we can see and measure is temporary and passing. So we need to think about what’s around us that is permanent and eternal, and invest in those things.

God.

People.

God’s word.

God’s work in people’s lives.

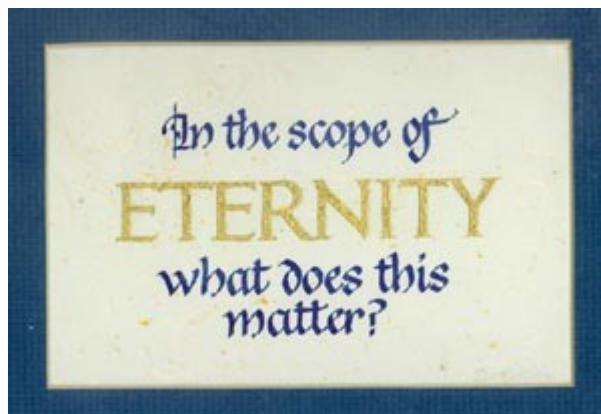
And the things we do to honor God and bless others. [Randy Alcorn writes](#), “With eternity in view, nearly any honest activity-whether building a shed, driving a bus, pruning trees, changing diapers or caring for a patient-can be an investment in God’s kingdom.”

One of my friends is a TSA agent. She diligently reminds herself daily that every traveler who comes through the security line is infinitely valuable because they are made in the image of God, and Jesus died for them. She showers kindness on them because they are so important. One of her co-workers, for whom work is just a job where he punches a time clock, told her, “In two years you’ll stop being nice to everyone.” We don’t think so. She works at maintaining an eternal perspective, seeing the unseen, to the glory of God.

Remembering the Long View

Another aspect of living with an eternal perspective is focusing on the reality that our time on earth is short, especially compared to the never-ending life on the other side of death.

Another one of my favorite questions is to ask, “A hundred years from now, when you are face to face with Jesus in heaven, what do you want to be glad you chose today? Indulging your flesh and doing whatever you think will make you happy, or making choices that honor God and bless other people?”



Several years ago I wrote a [blog post](#) about one of the power tools for our “life tool belt” that remains an essential part of my eternal perspective: passing everything through the grid of the great question, “In the scope of eternity, what does this matter?”

In the decades since I started asking that question, it’s still the best filter for deciding what’s worth getting upset about, and what to let go, and what to just roll over into the Lord’s hands.

Moses was very helpful for helping us develop an eternal perspective. He writes in Psalm 90:10, “Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures.” So we need to be sober about how much time we actually have. Then he writes a great prayer in verse 12 that helps us remember the long view: “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

So I did.

As of today, I have lived 24,500 days.

If I live to be 70, I have only 1,050 days left.

If I live to be 80, I have only 4,700 days left.

Oh my word, I have so much earthly work to do in a very short time, before my life continues on the other side! And I so want to grow older well.

One way to do that is to pre-decide now that we will use our earthly days fully, engaged in ministry, as long as God gives us breath.

Years ago, my view of living with an eternal perspective was shaped by a lady who decided to start college in her 70s. When they asked her why she would do such a thing when her life was basically over, she said, "Oh no! It's not over! I'm preparing for the next part of my life in heaven! The more equipped I can get on earth, the more ready I'll be for what the Lord has for me on the other side!"

Another lady was homebound because she was so disabled. She got the word out that every afternoon, her home was open for anyone who needed prayer. Some days it was like there was a revolving door, so many coming and going! She had a vibrant ministry in the waning days of her life because she was determined to use her remaining earthly days fully, to the glory of God.

In the time you have now, live well. To the glory of God. Keep reminding yourself that everything we do now has an eternal impact. Our choices, our behaviors, our words, ripple into eternity. Which is why we need to seek to do everything for the glory of God.



I lettered this calligraphy and put it in a frame in my kitchen next to the coffee maker so I see it and recite it to myself every morning.

Two great questions to consider: "Lord, in order to live well, in order to live to Your glory, with an eternal perspective, what do You want me to do less of in the time I have left? And what do You want me to do more of?"

As a mom of littles, Nicole Johnson was feeling sorry for herself when she met with a friend who had just returned from Europe. [She writes](#),

"My friend turned to me with a beautifully wrapped package, and said, 'I brought you this.' It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe. I wasn't exactly sure why she'd given it to me until I read her inscription: 'With admiration for the greatness of what you are building when no one sees.'

"In the days ahead I would read—no, devour—the book. And I would discover what would become for me, four life-changing truths, after which I could pattern my work:

- "1) No one can say who built the great cathedrals—we have no record of their names.
- 2) These builders gave their whole lives for a work they would never see finished.

- 3) They made great sacrifices and expected no credit.
- 4) The passion of their building was fueled by their faith that the eyes of God saw everything.

“There’s a story in the book about a rich man who came to visit the cathedral while it was being built, and he saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, ‘Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof? No one will ever see it.’

“And the workman replied, ‘Because God sees it.’”

Living with an eternal perspective as we make choices and invest our time to glorify God is like building a cathedral that we won’t be able to see finished.

But every “next faithful step” of the tasks in your life, is building something. The things you do that no one sees but God—the unseen and eternal—they matter!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/what-does-it-mean-to-live-with-an-eternal-perspective/ on March 17, 2021.

Glorious Morning Glories

This is what love looks like.

My husband planted morning glories for me on our back fence because they are my favorite.



I love that a whole new batch of brand new blooms pops out each morning, day after day of fresh beauty that reminds me of Lamentations 3:23, that God's mercies are "new every morning—great is Your faithfulness!"

This year, we had to wait long into the fall for the flowers. The green foliage was crazy lush and full for months, but there were no gorgeous "blue happies," as I think of them, until late October.

Finally they started exploding daily with beauty and color. Not long afterwards, an unseasonable cold snap hit us, and the green foliage started to wither and dry up.

But the "blue happies" kept popping out!



I had to smile at what was happening on our fence, because it was a powerful illustration of what it's like for me to grow older. The green leaves were getting old and spent and dry and yucky, at the same time that every morning, there were still fresh and new morning glory blooms sprouting out. What a picture of what has become my new life verse, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18—

Therefore we do not lose heart, but ***though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.*** For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

My body is growing older and weaker, especially ravaged by the lingering effects of polio. Not long ago, I spent almost two years [unable to walk](#) at all because of severe arthritis in both hips. (The Lord has restored so very much to me on the other side of two [hip replacements](#)!) I'm able to walk and stand without pain these days, for which I give thanks every single day, but the march of time continues and, like everyone else, I'm going downhill physically.

But—the glorious but!—on the inside I get to be fresh and new every day! Just like the “blue happies”! As I walk in faithfulness with the Lord, seeking to abide in Him and allow the beauty and character of Christlikeness to flow into and through me, He keeps bringing renewed energy and joy to my soul. Every day! I love it!

The hope for us as believers, especially older believers, is that we get to be renewed daily with the radiance and vibrancy and joy of Jesus within that keeps getting better and better the older we get!

In fact, the Bible even speaks about our transformation as a special kind of glory: 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 says,

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

I LOVE being transformed, a little bit every day, into the image of Jesus, with ever-increasing glory! I get to be a spiritual morning glory!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/glorious-morning-glories/ on December 15,
2020.

Invisible Women

Sue Bohlin addresses the call for the church to meet the needs of single moms and those widowed by death, divorce, desertion,

and imprisonment.

The other morning at church, I was talking to one of our church leaders as he spotted one of our three-year-olds making a run for the lobby. He called the boy's name three times, including extending his hand for a high-five, and was ignored all three times. (I'm a boy mom. I get it. The little guy was completely focused on escaping the worship center—no room for any other thoughts!) Laughing, I asked my friend, "Hey, how are you doing with that 'feeling invisible' thing?"

He was fine with it. But there are a number of people in our churches for whom feeling invisible is no laughing matter. It hurts.

A few days later, I was privileged to teach on 1 Timothy 5, where Paul gives Timothy direction on caring well for the widows in his congregation. In preparing for my message, I learned that in the first century, "widow" referred to a much larger group of women than just those whose husbands had died.

Widows could be women who had lost husbands through death, divorce, desertion, or imprisonment. (We have all four of those in our church.) They could even be women whose polygamist husbands had come to faith in Christ and learned that God's plan for marriage is one man and one woman, and they sent all but one wife away. Widows could also refer to unmarried women; the sense of "widow" in the first century was a "without-a-man woman." And of course in that time, when women had so few rights and privileges, that was a scary situation.

Paul's instruction to Timothy on superintending the care of widows resonates with how important vulnerable women are to God. The Old Testament has 32 references to widows or widows and orphans! If God says something once it's important . . . but THIRTY-TWO TIMES??!! In the New Testament, the Lord's brother James sums up this Old Testament value, defining true

religion as caring for widows and orphans in their distress (1:27).

How should the church care for vulnerable women today? The ones who can easily feel invisible in the church?

One group we need to take better care of is single moms.

I asked my dear friend, a single mom, about her experience. She was grateful for the ways in which a few people from her church stepped in to provide physically in various ways:

- A new friend brought her son to the hospital when she was suddenly admitted, and then cared for him until she was discharged.
- They mowed her lawn
- Some folks gave her a break by taking her son for a few hours to several days
- One especially memorable year, a man took her son to the store to get my friend her one and only Mother's Day gift

But she was always plagued by a constant longing—for belonging, for protection and help, for men to provide balance to her over-protective feminine mothering.

- She longed for a healthy family to draw them into their home and invite them for meals and family times together so they could see what “healthy” and “loving” and “respectful” looked like.
- She longed for a man to invest in her son so he could see how the boy treated his mom and take him aside to say, “Hey buddy, it’s not OK to talk to your mom that way.”
- She longed for a family to say, “Come spend Christmas with us” so it wasn’t just her and her son alone with the Christmas tree—again.

In addition to relational needs, many single moms have needs

for practical assistance concerning their homes and cars. And another group of “invisible women” with the same kinds of needs are older single women.

Typical practical needs:

- Help with assembling furniture such as from Ikea
- Trimming trees and other kinds of yard work
- Home repair
- Changing out-of-reach light bulbs
- Winterizing (and then summerizing) a house
- Organizing a closet, room, or garage
- Changing the oil in the car
- Moving stuff (both to a new home and just moving heavy furniture in the house)
- Plumbing help such as installing a new faucet, fixing a dripping faucet or running toilet
- Installing a ceiling fan
- Grocery shopping
- Rides to the doctor, chemo appointments, tests, surgeries and procedures
- Babysitting and carting kids places they need to go
- Helping with budgeting and financial direction
- Meals: home-cooked and delivered, gift cards to restaurants

Just as in the church at Ephesus when Paul was helping Timothy love his people well, we need to connect those with needs, with the people gifted to serve. Or even those without supernatural giftings for service, but a generous, Christlike heart to love others. That’s how the church cares for its own.

So they don’t feel invisible.

This
blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/invisible-women/ on October 25, 2020.

On Suicide

The incidence of depression, anxiety, and suicide has skyrocketed as the isolation and life-disruption from Covid-19 has ravaged our world. I wrote this post in April 2013, but it's even more salient today.

Over the weekend, Rick Warren (pastor of Saddleback Church in California, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*) and his wife Kay revealed that their son Matthew had taken his life after a lifelong struggle with mental illness. In an email to his church, Pastor Warren wrote, “[O]nly those closest knew that he struggled from birth with mental illness, dark holes of depression, and even suicidal thoughts. In spite of America’s best doctors, meds, counselors, and prayers for healing, the torture of mental illness never subsided.”

Many years ago, I was privileged to take a three-year lay counseling class from a wise and experienced man who taught us that those who commit suicide don’t really want to die; they just want the pain to end. Deep depression feels like being locked in a dark dungeon with no way out. The pain can become intolerably intense; one friend likened it to being forced to hold a large cauldron of boiling liquid with no hot pads. Those of us who have been spared from deep depression cannot really imagine how dark and how painful it is.

Psalm 139:16 says, “All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.” That means that before God even creates us, He knows the day of our death. That also means that those who commit suicide are dying on their ordained last day. Most of the time, though, God intervenes in people’s plans to end their lives, each story different and drenched in grace.

When one teenage girl learned she was pregnant, she planned to drive one of her family's cars into an embankment at the end of the week-but her parents sold that car before she could carry out her plan, and she decided she couldn't wreck the one remaining vehicle. Today, she is so glad she gave birth to her baby girl, who brought immeasurable joy to her adoptive parents, and enjoys her life of service to God which includes her own family.

Another friend lay in bed one night planning to end her life by walking out in front of an 18-wheeler on the nearby interstate. As she thought about making her way in her nightgown across the empty field that lay between her house and the highway, she suddenly thought, "I can't walk across that field in my bare feet!" . . . and turned over and went back to sleep.

When our son was suicidally depressed in high school, his friend came to us and told us of his plan to hurt himself a few days later. He was not pleased that his friend had "betrayed" him, but we were so grateful-and it enabled us to get him some badly-needed help.

There are so many stories of God's intervention that when we do hear of someone taking their own life, I do believe it means God allowed it because it was their ordained day. This doesn't diminish the pain for the survivors, though.

My dear friend Caren Austen, responding to the news of Matthew Warren's suicide, wrote an essay revealing her own struggles with mental illness and suicidal depression so that people would know what it's like. With her permission, I gratefully share these excerpts:

"I am not weak, lacking in faith, demon-possessed or oppressed or anything else but suffering from faulty brain chemistry.

"The disorder affects my daily life: my ability to work,

interact with other people, activities of daily living to the point of sometimes being unable to get out of bed or leave my house. I hate it. I hate that God has chosen this path for my growth and sanctification. Depression is my nearly constant companion. I rarely get a break. I wake up with it. I work with it. I go to sleep with it, knowing that tomorrow I'll wake up and live it all over again.

"There are so many of us who suffer silently, because it is not acceptable to discuss mental illness. Cancer is OK. People have sympathy and understanding for that. Cystic Fibrosis, diabetes, MS and the multitude of other terrible diseases and disorders are acceptable. Mental illness is considered taboo. The stigma attached to it prevents people from getting the help they need, from picking up the phone, from asking for prayer.

"Many, many people, especially Christians, negatively judge people with mental illness and especially those who have made the awful decision to take their own lives. A common statement is: 'It's the ultimate selfish act.' I'd ask you to consider what agony any individual must be enduring to fight every natural instinct for survival to choose instead to die. To be feeling psychic pain so incredible that the very thought of even one more moment is unendurable. I have, in the past, been completely and thoroughly convinced that if I loved my family, especially my children, as I said I did, I would remove the evil (me) from their lives, so I would no longer influence them for evil.

"These are the kinds of thoughts that people who choose suicide experience. They are not to be judged harshly. They are to be seen with compassion. Yes, it is an unspeakable tragedy that leaves those left behind with the worst kind of pain. A pain that I can't even imagine as they believe that the one who died didn't love them enough to fight. I know those are the thoughts, the feelings of those left behind, but they are not the actual reasons suicide was chosen. In

fact, just the opposite is likely true. The one who chooses suicide often does it out of love for those they care most about, as strange as that may seem.”

Please, please pray for the Warren family and for all those teetering on the edge of suicide. God knows who they are. It may even be someone you know and love.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/on_suicide/.

The Internet Dad With Millions of Kids

A father's YouTube channel went viral during the pandemic as he kindly taught adulting skills to the fatherless. Sue Bohlin just loves this sunny spot on the internet!

This Father's Day, millions of people worldwide will have a new dad to salute and appreciate. The “Internet Dad” is a warm, loving father-figure whose YouTube channel [“Dad How Do I?”](#) exploded during the Coronavirus quarantine.

Rob Kenney creates unfussy, easy-to-understand how-to videos on practical adulting tasks like how to change the tire on a car, how to iron a dress shirt, how to shave, and how to use tools like a stud finder, pliers and a wrench. He's a natural teacher, but what has captivated over two million subscribers in just a couple of months is his heart.

Every single video radiates *kindness*. You know, the fruit of the Spirit that seems to be in alarmingly short supply these

days?



He starts his videos with a smiling, “Hi kids!” and always includes a dad joke. A perfect dad joke, even when he messes up. (“Did you hear the joke about the butter? . . . Oh, I just blew it. Did you hear the *rumor* about the butter? Well, I’m not gonna spread it . . .”) As a response to the overwhelming number of views and heartfelt comments, Rob started creating simple messages from the heart; his “Thank You” (for people’s enthusiastic response) video has had over 1.6 million views in just under a month. His description for a video titled “I Am Proud of You” reads, “The internet can’t understand what you all just did! Apparently it doesn’t have an algorithm for kindness. :0) I am proud of all of you!” He has read a children’s book with the intention to read one a month.

He’s being the dad every heart longs for.

Viewers’ comments on Rob’s videos are the most eloquent expression of the worldwide father hunger I’ve ever seen.

One repeated sentiment Rob himself has responded to, which really touched *his* heart, was the sweetly defensive “Protect this man at all costs!”

In the comments on the “I Am Proud of You” video, I was moved to tears by a long thread of “kids” from different countries responding to one poster’s heartbreaking comment: “The words any Asian child dreams of hearing their whole life.” Then “amens” from around the globe: China. India. Eastern Europe. Arabia. Indonesia. And, of course, the United States.

Such heart hunger! Such pain from absent, or distant, or abusive, fathers!

- My dad.. Actually tried to kill me when I was little... He never loved me . . . Will you be my new dad?. . . My Internet dad?
- I've always been scared that when I grow up and if I become a father I won't be able to teach my children "dad" things because no one taught me. Thank you this might change that.
- As someone who's dad left behind 6 girls and a wife, i have NEVER ever appreciated a mans help before. ♥this makes my heart hurt in a good way♥
- "You got this and I'm proud of you." I have a dad and I'm still crying
- Everytime he says hi kids i just wanna say hi dad.
- "I Love you, I'm proud of you, God bless you." All of the internet crying

(OK, I'm gonna stop pasting in comments now. I can't see for the tears.)

What delights me the most about this "Mister Rogers for Adults" is that Rob is a Christ follower. He allows Father God to love His hurting (and not-so-hurting) children through him. The millions of people who watch his videos, and especially the over 100,000 commenters, are experiencing the affection and warmth of the God who loves them more than they can imagine, and this God is using technology to reach millions of people around the world with His love—packaged in a way they can receive.

And It. Is. Glorious!

In the midst of a very hard time for us as a society, it seems that God the Father has bestowed a Father's Day gift on people they didn't know they needed.

God bless you, Internet Dad. I'm proud of you, too. And Happy

Father's Day, brother.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/the-internet-dad-with-millions-of-kids/ on June 16, 2020.

Two Sides to Every Story. Especially Now.

Sue exhorts us to make Proverbs 18:17 our filter to find the balance in news stories, analyses, and opinion pieces by asking wise questions and finding trustworthy sources.

Please, please, please, make this powerful Proverb the filter through which you process information, especially during this Corona-Crazy time:

The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

Proverbs 18:17

We HAVE to remember that there are two sides to every story, particularly now when we have to navigate a slippery slope of opinion, and fake news, and deliberately skewed news, and trustworthy reporting of facts.

Many people are grabbing one compelling-sounding video or article or even just a meme on social media, and they stop thinking there. We need to be asking ourselves the power questions that help us think:

What do they mean by _____? We need to make sure that we understand what others mean by the words and terms they use.

Politically- and ideologically-charged rhetoric often uses language that means something very different from what it appears on the surface. For example, the innocuous-sounding “Equality Act” is intended to severely restrict and punish those who hold to a biblical perspective on gender and sexuality—who, it is clear, are not considered equal to those who hold pro-LGBT values.

Where do they get their information? There are extreme-right and extreme-left sources that pump out nothing but slanted and unbalanced ideas. We need to be aware of the difference between reports from the very conservative Infowars and The Blaze, and the leftist MSNBC and CNN.

How can we know it's true? Much of what appears to be journalism today is analysis and opinion pieces. How are your discernment skills? Can you tell the difference between factual reporting and spin? Probably not if you live in a bubble of only opinions and voices you agree with. “Confirmation bias” is a powerful dynamic that keeps us from considering anything from a different perspective. This is why it's essential to keep in mind, as Proverbs 18:17 reminds us, that there are two sides to every story, and we need to delay clamping down our minds on a position until we have more information and perspective. Do you know about allsides.com? That's a good place to find news from the left, from the center, and the right.

(Please see my article [“Four Killer Questions: Power Tools for Great Question-Asking”](#))

My extremely wise colleague at Probe Ministries, Steve Cable, offered this counsel in his article [“Seeing Through News Media Bias: Exposing Deception and Proclaiming Truth in an Age of Misinformation”](#):

“[W]e need to be on the alert for the warning signs of misinformation. When we recognize the need for discernment,

begin by asking God for wisdom in looking for and applying the truth:

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5-6).

“Then we need to ask ourselves some tough questions about the article or news report:

1. Does it begin with truth?
2. Is it logical?
3. Does it consider all of the evidence?
4. Does the conclusion make sense apart from the argument?
5. Does it stand up to close examination?”

These are great questions.

And we need to hang on tight to common sense, not being afraid to ask questions of what we’re reading and hearing. Biological viruses will not be transmitted through cell towers. Washing our hands thoroughly will ALWAYS be a good idea. We were told not to wear masks, now we’re told to wear masks; maybe there’s not a one-size-fit-all rule?

Conspiracy theories abound; is anybody addressing the assertions in them? At this point in time, Google is still our friend in finding the answer to that question.

The bottom line is that we need to always remember that “the first to make his case *seems* right, until the other comes and examines him.” If we’ve only heard the first side, we need to hold our thoughts and judgments loosely until we hear if there is another side.

And be kind the whole time.

This blog post originally appeared at

3 Truths to Feed Our Hope in a Pandemic

*When the world is upside down due to unforeseen circumstances, we need hope, but not just any hope. Sue explains that **biblical hope** is something different. Something better. Because it's about God.*

When pretty much the whole world is in stay-at-home mode . . .
when pretty much the whole world is impacted by sudden unemployment because the whole world is in stay-at-home mode . . .
. . . when pretty much the whole world's economy might be affected by the crazy fall in oil prices . . .

We desperately need hope.

Hope that things will get better. Hope that we will be able to experience "normal" again. Hope that everyone's stress level will go down, especially health care heroes and first responders.

I've been thinking a lot about hope lately.

Your everyday kind of hope is a wish or expectation for the future. It's oxygen for the soul. An important part of mental health is being able to look forward to something good.

But *biblical hope* is something different. Something better. Because it's about God.

Where everyday hope is about wishing, biblical hope is a

confident expectation that God will be good, and He will do good, toward us. It is faith in the future tense.

Everyday hope is horizontal, looking at circumstances, the world, and other people—which are all broken by the Fall, and they are guaranteed to disappoint. But biblical hope is vertical. It looks UP instead of out. Biblical hope is focused on a perfect, loving God who is all-knowing and all-powerful. He doesn't just *know* the future, He *holds* the future.

We can encourage one another daily, as Hebrews 3:13 urges us, by reminding ourselves and each other of what is true. Let me suggest three truths that will feed our hope.

God is good.

Probably the #1 lie of the enemy is that God ISN'T good. It's what was behind his temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden: that God was holding out on her because He's not good.

And when life is hard and we live in pain, it's easy to look through the filter of "God is not good, that's why He's letting me hurt."

But the truth is that our circumstances are not an accurate indicator of whether God is good or not. Our logic and thinking are not accurate judges of whether God is good or not.

Even if we don't say it out loud, we can sit in the self-pity puddle of the belief, "If God was good, He wouldn't let me hurt."

But our pain is achieving something eternally significant, an eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). When life is hard, God is doing something really big in us. And eventually, for those who have trusted Christ, God's goodness will mean He carries us to the place where there is no more pain, no more tears, no more sickness or weakness or even disappointment.

That is our hope, that the future will hold nothing but GOOD for us.

We're not there yet. But it's coming!

God is faithful.

He is faithful in His character, He is faithful to His word, He is faithful to His promises.

Faithfulness means being a promise-keeper, even when it's hard. The Hebrew word for faithfulness means steadfastness, firmness.

On a trip to Colorado, my brother-in-law Phil learned that a cashier at Rocky Mountain National Park was also from Chicago. He said, "It must be cool to be here with these mountains all the time."

"Let me tell you something about the mountains," she responded. "They're . . . always . . . THERE." Meaning, they don't move, they don't change, and it takes a long time to get from A to B because those mountains are always THERE.

Like God's faithfulness.

We can have hope that God will remain faithful to His promises, such as Jesus promising, "I will be with you always."

Sports Illustrated covered a memorable incident at the 1992 Olympics when runner Derek Redmond tore his hamstring near the end of the race. He fell face first onto the track in agony.

As the medical attendants were approaching, Redmond fought to his feet. "It was animal instinct," he would say later. He set out hopping, in a crazed attempt to finish the race. When he reached the stretch, a large man in a T-shirt came out of the stands, hurled aside a security guard and ran to Redmond, embracing him. It was Jim Redmond, Derek's father.

“You don’t have to do this,” he told his weeping son. “Yes, I do,” said Derek. “Well, then,” said Jim, “we’re going to finish this together.” And so they did.

Fighting off security men, the son’s head sometimes buried in his father’s shoulder, they stayed in Derek’s lane all the way to the end, as the crowd gaped, then rose and howled and wept.[\[1\]](#)

Most people don’t remember who won the gold medal in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, but millions will never forget the faithful love of a father who left his seat in the stands to enable his son to finish his race.

What a picture of our faithful heavenly Father who sent His Son from His seat in glory to earth to rescue and redeem us! Jesus promises that He will be with us always, to the end of the age—just as Derek Redmond’s father was with his son to the end of the race.

God is at work in my life.

Philippians 1:6 promises that He who began a good work in me will continue to complete it. Once God gets started on the process of making us like Jesus, He doesn’t quit!

One of my pastors has said that if you don’t like how things are, it means the story’s not over and God’s not finished.

How encouraging is that??!

Romans 8:28 teaches us, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.”

Since God is at work in us, then He has a plan to make us like Jesus, and He’s using every situation and every circumstance in our lives as His tools.

When we open our hearts and minds to God’s plans to make us

like Jesus, and we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the process, it strengthens our hope that our future will be different from the past or the present.

But to be like Jesus means we have to follow Him, which means denying ourselves, and taking up our cross. It means not fighting the tools of sanctification He is using to make us like Jesus. The best way to do that is to obey scripture, which says to give thanks IN everything, FOR everything. If God has allowed it, there must be a purpose in it. It means developing an attitude of gratitude by disciplining ourselves to say, "This stinks, Lord, but You have allowed it in my life so I will give You thanks for this crummy boss, or this difficult roommate situation, or this physical challenge, or this thorn in my flesh."

When we realize we are not content with WHO we are or HOW we are, because we long to be better, it means God's not finished with us. We are still a work in progress. The story's not over.

It means there is hope. Biblical hope.

God is good, God is faithful, and God is at work in me. Those are the truths that will feed our hope and allow us to look at the future with confident expectation that it's going to be better than OK . . . it's going to be amazing. Either in this life, or on the other side, we can have hope.

A living hope. Hope has a name. His name is Jesus.

1. vault.si.com/vault/1992/08/17/track-and-field-ode-to-joy-carl-lewis-exulted-along-with-all-of-barcelonas-gold-medalists-many-of-whom-vanquished-giants-to-win-their-events. Accessed 4/21/2020.

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