

# The Great Pains of Perfectionism

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

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

- Doing all the household chores because that way they will be done *right*. Then feeling resentful because no one ever offers to help and here she is, doing all the work herself.
- Reading Every. Single. Greeting card. To make sure they picked the perfect one.
- Rearranging the dishes in the dishwasher to her standards.
- Correcting details in your spouse's stories.
- Laying out your children's clothes every day. Making their beds. Cleaning their rooms. Not letting them learn how to do anything for themselves because it won't be perfect like you do it.
- People who drive in the fastest lane and go exactly the speed limit, trying to control others' behavior.
- Telling a child they can't eat egg "on the toast," you must take one bite of egg, then one bite of toast.
- Staying up all night to clean for a party because someone might see one speck of dirt, or one thing out of place (as if someone is going to look in every corner of your house).
- After my mother vacuumed the living room floor, if she found footprints in the carpet, she lined us up and measured our feet to the prints. The culprit was made to

bear the shame of messing up her hard work and had to re-vacuum the floor.

- If unhappy with your wife's figure, as she eats things you disapprove of, you actually remove it from her hands and throw it in the trash.
- The table top is dirty. If you don't use a tablecloth or placemats, you are scum and she won't eat your food. One time I stacked the placemats the wrong way (one on top of another instead of folding them to the inside and stacking them, so that the table dirt doesn't spoil them), and they all had to be washed. One time I unknowingly put clean laundry in the dirty laundry basket and it all had to be re-washed. She washed all kitchen knives, poured boiling water over them and baked them in the oven!

At the core of a controlling person is fear. "I am not okay and I'm going to be exposed as not okay." That fear makes them feel that life is outside of their control, so they have to manipulate other people and situations to get control back. I learned this when I was trying to control my high school son who kept making choices I didn't approve of, and I tried to pull in a third person to do SOMETHING to make him do what I wanted. That third person, who became one of my mentors, refused to be triangulated into the situation, and explained how my controlling behavior showed my panic at not being in control, and was a pathetic attempt to get it back. But since control has always been an illusion (like driving on ice!), it didn't work.

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

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

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

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

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

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## **Remodeling a Home—and a Soul**



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

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

The first thing that happened was that things got moved. Our bed was moved to an enclosed porch, which is a great blessing given the amount of construction dust in our bedroom. Our hanging clothes got moved to rented racks in our dining room, along with all the suitcases and other kinds of things on shelves. (It pretty much looks like a bomb went off in our home!)

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

and rely on Him.

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

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

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

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

They parked a trailer outside our back door, and it was soon filled with sheet rock, wood, marble and glass that needed to be taken to the city dump because it was trash. I mentioned this to the man in charge, who cheerfully agreed that "You gotta get rid of the ugly!" Since I also shared with him my thoughts about the parallel to sanctification, he laughed with me that that's what God does: He gets rid of our ugly. He targets anything that's not glorifying to Himself or helpful to us, and pulls it out. Or calls us to let it go into His hands.

I noticed there is a definite order to things. The open spaces for closets and bathrooms were widened before installing new doors. The walls were textured before being painted. The

bathtub was pulled out, and its faucet and spigot were removed, before the tiler comes to give us a beautiful new wall.

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

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

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

The owner of a construction company that does these remodeling jobs for mobility-challenged people like me has a picture in his mind of what all these changes will look like in the end. I have a vague idea of what changing the entrance to our bedroom will look like, and how the reconfigured closet will work, and what it will be like to roll into the shower, but he has a very specific plan in mind based on experience and knowledge and wisdom.

My heavenly Father has a very specific plan for my remodeling too. He knows what making me over into the image of His Son

means, so I will look like Sue and Jesus both.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. From the time they are itty-bitty, play "Spot the Lie." Pay

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## What’s Your Superpower?

If you could choose a superpower, which one would it be? When

asked this question as an icebreaker, I've heard some people say they'd love to fly; others say they would choose mindreading. Some would love to be invisible.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Word of Wisdom** – The supernatural ability to have insight concerning God's perspective and relay this insight succinctly

to others. "Deep insight with handles."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## **“This Too Shall Pass”**

*I wrote this blog post on May 7, 2012, not quite five years ago. I had no idea that by this point, I would hardly be walking, using a scooter 95% of the time and unable to move without a walker for the rest. Pain and serious weakness are my daily companions. As I noticed the counts on my most popular blog posts and discovered this one among the top, I am grateful that the wisdom God gave me five years ago is even more true today. And I am grateful that I can even minister to myself . . .*

Sometimes it's the simplest things that help us navigate life. The old, old adage “this too shall pass” is one of them.

No matter what trial, grief, trouble or challenge we face, there is comfort in reminding ourselves that it's temporary. Some are very short-lived—the time crunch of a deadline, the pain of recovering from surgery, waiting for results of a test or an application. We can remind ourselves, “By this time next week (or month), this will be behind me. This too shall pass.”

Some are very long-term—a permanent disability like [my polio](#) or my dear friend [Lael Arrington's](#) painful rheumatoid arthritis. The death of a loved one, or a marriage, or a cherished dream. The realization that God is choosing to give us grace for, not deliverance from, our thorn in the flesh. Even so, when we remember that our time on this earth is short compared to our life on the new earth, we can remind ourselves, “A hundred years from today, this trial will be just a memory. I can either be glad for how I handled it, or regret the short-sighted choices I made. Because this too shall pass.”

It's helpful to remember that even the good times, the fun times, the stress-free (or low-stress) times will also pass, because life is like that. When we remember everything is temporary, it helps us hold onto sweet moments and days with a looser grasp while reminding ourselves to be grateful for the blessings we're enjoying because “this too shall pass.” If we are mindful of the transience of the good days, we won't be devastated when they dissipate.

“This too shall pass” is one way we can live in light of eternity, keeping our earthly life in perspective. When the hard times come, whether moments or years, we can comfort ourselves with the truth that “our momentary, light suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison because we are not looking at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

When the good times come, we can give thanks for the way they point like signposts to heaven's unending joy.

Which will NEVER pass away!

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/this\\_too\\_shall\\_pass](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/this_too_shall_pass) on May

8, 2012.

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## The Voice in My Head

I love my husband's recent Christmas gift to me: a hearing aid. (Actually, he appreciates it about as much as I do, since I'm not daily asking, "Excuse me?" and "What?") A number of years ago I had been diagnosed with a 25% hearing loss in one ear, but it had grown to 45%. That's a lot of missed words in conversations, sermons, and TV shows.

Mine is a little device that sits in my ear canal, pretty much invisible. Because it's so small, the battery is teeny tiny and needs to be replaced every five days or so. I know it's time to swap it out when a little metallic voice suddenly says "Battery" in my ear. That means I have maybe two minutes before a final, second "Battery"—then a small click that means my wonderful restored hearing is gone and I'm back to the world's sounds being muffled till I put a new battery in.

I am grateful for that little voice because it tells me something very important about something I need to do, and fast.

And every time, I am reminded of Isaiah 30:21—"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." My immediate prayer is, "Lord, please teach me to hear you as clearly as I hear that little voice in my ear!"

Hearing God's voice is a realistic part of being in relationship with him. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah 33:3 records God's invitation: "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not

known." In the New Testament, Jesus promises, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

So how do we hear God's voice?

1. **Choose to listen.** It starts with being intentional. We need to believe that God speaks to His children, and act on that belief by putting ourselves in "listening mode." That's not about sitting down with a demanding spirit that says, "OK, Lord, you have five minutes to talk to me or I'm outta here." In my experience, the God of the universe does not respond to self-centered demands like that. It's more like turning on a baby monitor and leaving it in the "always on" position. And keeping one ear "open" for any sounds coming from the monitor.

The primary way God speaks to us is through his word. Sometimes as we read the scriptures, a verse seems to leap off the page, right into our hearts, and burn with a personal application. Even as a new believer in college, I knew that when I read Isaiah 55:2, the context was God speaking to his people Israel: "Why do you spend your money on that which is not bread, and your wages on that which does not satisfy?" But in 1973, struggling with a holy discontent about my college degree plan, God spoke to me through this verse, giving me the freedom to stop college at the end of my junior year. And sure enough, in the 43 years since, I have never once regretted not earning a degree in elementary education because being a classroom teacher was never God's plan for my life. Teaching, yes, but not in a school classroom.

But God also speaks to us in our spirit. My friend Bob was a pastor. One morning he felt impressed to drive to a nearby lake to meet with God. He sat there on a picnic bench waiting to hear from God (and, frankly, expecting some direction on what to preach the following Sunday). After 45 minutes of just quietness, hearing nothing, he sensed God say to him, "OK, Bob, you can go to your office now."

Eyebrows raised, he said, "I thought maybe you were going to give me some instruction on what you want me to preach this Sunday . . .? What's the point of sitting here for almost an hour, Lord?"

In his spirit, Bob heard, "I just wanted to spend some time with you."

It takes time and practice to learn to hear God like Bob does (and he learned over time and by practicing). But that's what friends do. They talk with each other.

**2. Expect God to speak.** Who knows how many things in life we miss simply because we weren't expecting them, so they blow right by? When we live with an attitude of expectancy, it's a lot easier to hear that "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) when God does speak to us.

I learned this while at a conference a number of years ago. So many of the conference attendees lived with this attitude of expectancy that it was common mealtime conversation to share what people had heard and experienced from the Lord that day. I wanted that for myself! I went from one session to the next "with my ears on" (in old CB-radio lingo), hopeful to hear from God.

I was in one breakout session about fifteen minutes when I suddenly became aware of a strong impression—a pressure on my heart—that I was supposed to call my husband. Right then. It came out of the blue, connecting to nothing I was hearing in the breakout, so I left the session and walked to my dorm room to get to a phone (oh, how things have changed with the invention of the cell phone!) When my husband answered, I learned that he was very sick and was feeling even worse because there was no way to contact me and he was feeling not just miserable, but *alone* and miserable. He was quite surprised to learn that God had told me to call him. There wasn't anything I could do from the other side of the country,

but it was comforting to both of us that God intervened so that we could talk to each other.

**3. Predecide to focus on God's voice** despite what other voices you're hearing. It takes time and experience to learn to recognize his voice, but I can promise you this: it will never contradict his word, and his peace will be attached. We hear the "voice" or sounds of what matters to us. I once read a story about a native American who accompanied a city dweller to New York City. As they walked down the sidewalk, the native suddenly stopped in the midst of all that concrete and said, "I hear a cricket!" His city dwelling friend scoffed: "Are you kidding? How can you hear such a small sound with all this racket?" At that, the native pointed to the soil surrounding a small tree growing out of a concrete planter in the sidewalk; sure enough, there was a cricket rubbing its legs together. His friend shook his head, amazed. The native said, "It's not so amazing. We hear what's important to us. Watch this." He reached into his pocket, pulled out a handful of coins, and threw them on the sidewalk. Instantly, scores of people around them stopped, swiveling their heads at the sound of money hitting the ground. "See? What's important is money to them, and nature to me. We hear what's important to us."

We need to filter out the sounds and voices of the world, which would call us away from intimacy with God, and "keep the first thing, the first thing." When God speaks, we want to be found listening.

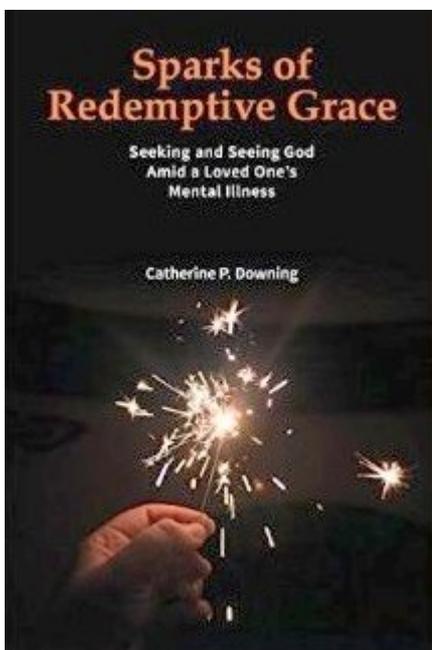
Because when he speaks, it's something far more important than "Battery."

This  
blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/the\\_voice\\_in\\_my\\_head](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_voice_in_my_head) on  
February 7, 2017.

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# Mental Illness and the Family

The January 2017 shooting at the Ft. Lauderdale airport is still being investigated, but what surfaced immediately in seeking a motive for Esteban Santiago's deadly action was his family's observations that he appeared to be fighting a mental health challenge. When he returned from military service in Iraq, he reported hearing voices and his family reported that "his mind was not right."



Totally apart from the issues Mr. Santiago is dealing with, both psychologically and legally, my heart goes out to his family. The family members of a person struggling with mental health issues carry a heavy load, often in isolation and silence, because of the stigma of shame often associated with mental illness.

I am more sensitive to this after recently reading a different kind of book. *Sparks of Redemptive Grace – Seeking and Seeing God Amid a Loved One's Mental Illness* is a short but powerful book written by the mother of a young man in a battle with bipolar disorder.

Catherine P. Downing offers grace-drenched perspective that can and should change the way we think about this struggle. I learned a lot from her. For example, she writes,

It is a heartbreaking truth that I had to learn to say, "Douglas has bipolar disorder," instead of, "Douglas is bipolar." A minor wording difference. A monumental identity distinction. To have a disease, rather than to be one, is a defining stance of dignity.

But it's not just the family members dealing with mental illness who need to be educated on how to think and respond and love well. We the *church family* also need to be better equipped to love "the least of these" with the compassion of Jesus. That is going to mean loving the family members staggering under the weight of their loved ones' illness as well. We are often quick to arrange meals for new mommies or families where someone has had surgery, but what about the families trudging through the exhausting day-in-day-out invisible battle when it's the brain or the mind that is diseased?

One of the ways we can love families dealing with mental illness is by adjusting our unrealistic expectations. Mental illness isn't something people "get over" quickly . . . and sometimes not even on this side of eternity.

And then there is the ongoing grieving for the should-have-beens of lost dreams and hopes, and even the loss of the "normal" kind of life most of us assume we will live. The first sentence of the introduction reads, "My husband, Nelson, once said that if we ever write a book the title should be, *It Wasn't Supposed to Be Like This.*" Those living with this kind of unrelenting grief need friends who will support them, never give up praying for them, being "Jesus with skin on" for them. (Check out this really excellent list of how to pray for families impacted by mental illness: [sparksofredemptivegrace.com/31days31ways2pray4familie](http://sparksofredemptivegrace.com/31days31ways2pray4familie)

[s/ \)](#)

I was blessed to read this short list of suggestions for how the church can support the families of those dealing with mental illness in the Bible.org article "[Mental Health and the Church](#)":

1. Make your church a safe place for those who suffer. To do that, a church body needs to be transparent about brokenness and acknowledge that all of us struggle with weak areas in our lives.
2. Equip your church with the tools it needs to serve those with mental illnesses and their families. Develop or identify your congregation's theology of suffering. Train clergy and staff. Offer support groups. Create alliances with local mental health professionals.
3. Treat hurting people like people. Be a friend. Include them in gatherings. Invite them when groups are going to lunch. As needed, refer them on to professional help, but don't pass them on. At the same time, set healthy boundaries in your relationships. Don't expect them to be able to do that.
4. Address the stigma of mental illness by talking about it openly. Include general prayers for the mentally ill in congregational praying. Highlight and financially support local ministries who serve the homeless, the incarcerated and indigent mentally ill populations.
5. Treat those with mental illnesses and their families as you would any who have chronic pain in their lives or are lifelong caregivers. Pray for and with them. Give them space to talk about what is going on in their lives. Attend to practical needs such as transportation to medical appointments, assist, when appropriate, with extraordinary expenses.

I have committed to make hearing new news about the Ft. Lauderdale shootings a reminder to pray for the family members of the troubled shooter. At the same time, I want to be “Jesus with skin on” for those in my world who need comfort for the same kind of pain in their family.

Also check out the website for this helpful little book, [www.sparksofredemptivegrace.com](http://www.sparksofredemptivegrace.com)

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/mental-illness-and-the-family/](http://blogs.bible.org/mental-illness-and-the-family/) on January 10, 2017.

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## Leaning Hard

I wondered when it would happen, when the pain and weakness from post-polio, exacerbated by hip arthritis, would set me up for a fall. And now I know. The other day I took a tumble.

I forgot to have my husband put my walker in the back of my mini-van. At some point this year I discovered that leaning on a cane for stability wasn't enough, and I need a walker for literally every step. But this level of loss and disability is still new to me; sometimes I forget that my “new normal” demands things like taking a walker with me. When I got to my destination, all I had was my cane, and I thought, “It's okay, I'll have the cane in my right hand and I can lean on the car with my left to make my way to the back of the van to get my scooter.”

But it was a drizzly day, and when I leaned hard on the bumper my hand slipped, and I went down HARD. Fortunately, it was also a cold day and my padded coat helped cushion my shoulder

and hip as I hit the ground. I instantly had a new appreciation for that old commercial, "I've fallen and I can't get up!" Yep. That was me.

My cell phone was in my pocket, praise God, and I was able to call for help. It took two aides to lift me to a vertical position and then get my scooter out of the van, shaken and feeling very fragile but basically okay.

The doctor I was there to see also came out, and when she spoke I knew it was the Lord's voice through her: "Sue, you're trying to do too much on your own." Yep. That was me too.

I've thought a lot about how things have changed for me in the past couple of years as I've lost so much of my mobility and ability to do even the simplest things around the house. And since there is often a strong correlation between the physical world and spiritual reality, each one teaching us something about the other, I've become especially aware of my dependence on my walker and my scooter.

So it deeply blessed me when a friend dealing with stage-four renal cancer was featured in a video where she quoted from J.I. Packer in Joni Eareckson Tada's book *A Lifetime of Wisdom*:

*"God uses chronic pain and weakness, along with other afflictions, as his chisel for sculpting our lives. Felt weakness deepens dependence on Christ for strength each day. The weaker we feel, the harder we lean. And the harder we lean, the stronger we grow spiritually, even while our bodies waste away. To live with your 'thorn' uncomplainingly – that is, sweet, patient, and free in heart to love and help others, even though every day you feel weak – is true*

*sanctification. It is true healing for the spirit. It is a supreme victory of grace."*

*The weaker we feel, the harder we lean. And the harder we lean, the stronger we grow spiritually, even while our bodies waste away. Whoa.*

"Leaning hard" is the opposite of our American, self-sufficient, can-do independence. But it's the secret to spiritual vitality and power because "leaning hard" means we access Christ's strength instead of our own puny efforts.

"Leaning hard" is my new way of understanding "abiding." And abiding is where stability comes from, just as I am far more stable when I'm "leaning hard" on my walker when I have to walk and on my scooter when I get to ride.

The memory of leaning hard on my slippery car bumper, only to discover it was not a reliable place to support myself so I landed hard on the ground, was also a powerful lesson in the futility of leaning hard on myself or anything other than Jesus Christ Himself. I now have a kinesthetic memory of that spiritual truth!

It stinks to fall, of course, but I sure do love the insight that came from it.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/leaning\\_hard](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/leaning_hard) on December 27, 2016.

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# Flying the W Flag



I'm not a baseball fan. I'm not even a sports fan. But I *am* originally from the northern suburbs of Chicago, which makes me a de facto Cubs fan. And in case you (like me) aren't really a sports fan either, you might not know about the drama unfolding in the 2016 World Series.

The Cubs haven't made it to the World Series since 1945. That's before I was born! (Long time, friends. Long time.) They finished among the worst teams in their league year after year, becoming something of a joke in the sports world.

So it was A BIG DEAL that the Cubs won the pennant and made it to the World Series this year.

When that happened, there was great rejoicing in the land. The packed-out Wrigley Field, the Cubbies' home ball park, broke out in the "Go Cubs Go" song, and it was a transcendent experience for those who were there.



But what grabbed me by the throat was seeing all the Cubs' "W" flags. One of the losing-est teams in all of sports, with some of the most incredibly loyal fans in all of sports, finally got to really celebrate the W in Win. They didn't even need to go all the way to win the World Series for people to go nuts with joy.

It wasn't the Cubs' Win, though, that gave me goosebumps. The blue W on the white field reminded me that we are assured of the ultimate Win for the ultimate cosmic battle that lies ahead. The Bible provides a look into the future when good vs. evil, and Satan vs. Jesus Christ, will battle it out, and *good will win*.

But the Cubs' W flag represents nothing more than hope that they just might win the World Series for the first time since 1908. There is no certainty. On the other hand, the cosmic battle between good and evil has already been determined, the book has been written, and we know the ending. In the end, **GOD WINS**. It's a done deal. And we who are in Christ win with Him.

There was never any better reason to fly a W flag!

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/flying\\_the\\_w\\_flag](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/flying_the_w_flag) on

November 2, 2016.

*Updated on the morning of November 4: The Cubs won the World Series! Must be a great time to be in Chicagoland! My family is very VERY excited. My White Sox fan husband, who grew up on the South Side of Chicago, not so much. Oh well.*

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## **When a Church Tells a Member, “It’s Not OK to be Gay”**

Watermark Community Church in Dallas (where my husband and I are members) was recently dragged into the media when a former member published a letter to the church on the one-year anniversary of his membership being revoked. After several years of fighting his unwanted same-sex attractions, the young man got weary of the battle and embraced a gay identity—and a boyfriend. The church pleaded with him to repent (turn 180 degrees) and submit to the Bible’s commands to sexual purity, but he would not. So the church sent him a letter which the young man made public.

Within hours, a firestorm erupted on social media, TV media, and print media.

Predictably, the church’s counter-cultural beliefs and stance were misrepresented out of people’s inability (or refusal) to understand biblical values and truths. It would be easy to come away with a very skewed perception of this situation, which is why it’s important to use discernment in reading or hearing anything about this controversial subject.

Recall the wisdom of Proverbs 18:17: “The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him.” It’s

important to remember there's another side of every story, and to hold judgment until one's discernment kicks in.

It started when the former member's Facebook post was picked up by the *Dallas Morning News*. His title was "Watermark Church Dismissed Me for Being Gay," and the paper chose the title "[Watermark Asks Homosexual Member to Leave Church](#)." It sure sounds like the church kicked him out, doesn't it? But that's not what happened. The church responded, "Watermark makes a distinction between attending our church [*Sue's note: which the former member was welcome to do*] and being a formal member of our church. We don't remove someone's formal status as a member for struggling with sin—whether that sin is pride, materialism or sexual sin. Every member of Watermark needs God's grace to stand firm in the midst of temptation and His forgiveness for the times we fall short."

Jacqueline Floyd, a *Dallas Morning News* columnist, wrote a scathing [column](#) criticizing Watermark.

Ms. Floyd:

**"A lot of people are upset that an institution that professes love for all its members would exile someone because of his sexual orientation."**

And they should be! But that's not what happened. Pastor Todd Wagner's [response](#):

"Following the example of Jesus, Watermark loves and welcomes people of all backgrounds, economic statuses, ethnicities and sexual struggles. Also following his example, we encourage people to turn away from sin and to follow Jesus. We have *many members* and *several staff* who struggle with same-sex attraction or for whom same-sex sexual activity is a part of their past. We count it a privilege to labor with them in their desire to resist temptation, and we rejoice with them as they experience forgiveness and new life in Christ. Their stories are

powerful and serve as beautiful testimonies to the transforming power of Jesus Christ.” [Emphasis his]

Ms. Floyd:

**“He tried for years to conform to church requirements that he alter his essential nature, ‘repent’ his sexual orientation, undergo a form of ‘conversion therapy’ that research as well as mainstream psychology and counselors have denounced as harmful and pointless.”**

This makes sense if you believe the culture’s sexual mythology that says being gay is one’s “essential nature,” as if a gay identity were the most important thing about an individual. (Consider how unbalanced it would be if we switched out the standard for how well someone can sing, declaring that one’s “essential nature” was one’s ability to carry a tune—or not. How awfully narrow and unnecessarily limiting that would be, as if every other aspect of one’s giftings and temperament, interests and abilities paled in comparison to their singing voice!)

The church does not require that anyone “alter their essential nature,” but it does align itself with scripture, acknowledging that we are all born sinful and broken, with a tendency to rebel and disobey against God:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;  
there is no one who understands;  
there is no one who seeks God.  
All have turned away,  
they have together become worthless;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one.” (Romans 3:10b-12)

Our true “essential nature” is that we are both infinitely precious and valuable because we are made in God’s image, but also fallen and sinful. That “essential nature” can’t be altered by ourselves, but it can be transformed by God. That

is the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I don't know if anyone at Watermark mistakenly urged this brother to repent of his sexual orientation as if he had chosen to be same-sex attracted, but we certainly do exhort everyone to renounce and repent of all sexual sin (which means anything outside of marriage between one man and one woman). Concerning "conversion therapy," Watermark doesn't have that. What we do have is a call to discipleship, asking people to be "all in" with Jesus, obeying His word and pursuing intimacy with Christ. That intimacy usually produces heart change, which means transformation from the inside out, where therapy is an attempt to bring about change from the outside in.

Ms. Floyd:

**"Trying to 'change' someone's sexual orientation is about as useful as trying turn a turtle into a duck. When this witch-doctor alchemy predictably failed to work, the church blamed him—and revoked his membership. Not in person. They mailed him a letter."**

Lots of people believe that sexual orientation is fixed and unchangeable. That's because if a lie is repeated loud enough and long enough, people will accept it as truth. Change is possible, and feelings (because that's what we're talking about here) are fluid. We see change happening in the first-century church; 1 Corinthians 6:11 says to former homosexuals, "And such were some of you." I have seen change happen before my own eyes, for 18 years of involvement at [Living Hope Ministries](#). And if that's not enough, google "Lisa Diamond Sexual Fluidity" for some intriguing academic [research](#) that cites that change happens.

But then it sure sounds cold to mail someone a letter revoking his membership. And it would be—if it had happened like that. The letter was just the final formal communication, the period at the end of a series of anguished, face-to-face conversations.

See why it's so important to remember that "The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him"?

The letter from our own former member needs to be read with discernment as well:

**"I spent years battling against my own homosexuality. When I wasn't able to change, you turned your back on me."**

I'm sure there were some people mistakenly thinking and hoping that his same-sex attractions were a matter of choice that could be changed on demand. "Everstraights," especially men, have a hard time imagining what it's like to be drawn to the same sex, and can easily burden those who are, with unrealistic expectations.

Battling one's homosexuality is incredibly difficult, and I can appreciate that many, many people pray hundreds of times, "God, I beg You, take this away!" That prayer is like mine growing up: "God, please! [Heal me!](#)" It's like the apostle Paul's prayer, recorded in 2 Corinthians 7b-9:

"I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Paul pleaded with God to remove his thorn in the flesh, but God had something better. I pleaded with God to remove my thorn in the flesh, but He had [something better](#). My same-sex attracted brother, our former member, pleaded with God to remove his thorn in the flesh, and He had something better for him as well, but my brother decided to embrace his flesh instead. He wrote,

**"I am who God made me to be. I cannot change my sexual orientation, and nor would I want to. I now have internal peace and happiness unlike ever before."**

No, God did not make anyone same-sex attracted. Based on the thousands of men who have come through Living Hope, I would say God probably made him to be sensitive, artistic, creative, relational, and gifted. But not gay.

It's not surprising that he now senses "internal peace and happiness unlike ever before." He quit battling his flesh, the part of us that lives independently from God. The relief that comes from giving into temptation can feel like peace and happiness, for a while. It can feel like freedom. But it comes at a cost. There is no true intimacy with Jesus when we are indulging our flesh. There can be a faux intimacy, the echoes of having walked with Him in obedience and abiding trust. But true intimacy can only happen in the light:

"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1 John 1:5-7)

So I pray for my brother, and I pray for all of us to develop discernment as we process the war of worldviews about sexual ethics. It won't be easy.

[Note: If you want a blessing and strong but grace-filled instruction about church discipline, please watch Todd Wagner's response to this issue from the Watermark platform, "Why Good Leaders Have Always Written Letters to the Church They Love": <http://www.watermark.org/plano/message/4320>]

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on October 18, 2016.