

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!

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Addressing Anxiety in

Tumultuous Times

Byron Barlowe connects the dots between the universal problem of anxiety, what brain science is teaching us about our minds, and how Scripture and spiritual disciplines can help. In a world consumed by violent riots and trauma surrounding the Covid virus, this is a timely topic that God and science speak to well.

Millions of people worldwide are battling anxiety in a tumultuous time. The Coronavirus pandemic response has created a new abnormal: heightened fear of sickness and death, economic damage, and social isolation. Loneliness is the number one health crisis in America according to many epidemiologists, psychiatrists, and social scientists.[{1}](#) While we're all still reeling from this, racial strife has erupted into looting, killings, and anarchy in American streets.

Mental health is an increasing concern too. One study found that during the spring 2020 mass quarantine, prescriptions for anti-anxiety meds spiked.[{2}](#) A San Francisco area hospital has seen more deaths by suicide than by Covid-19, prompting a call for an end to mass shutdowns.[{3}](#) *It's been a perfect storm of stress.*



Are there real solutions *right now*? Yes, brain science is confirming the truths and promises proclaimed in Scripture in exciting ways! We have wonderfully adaptive minds—especially when they are focused on God. These built-in mind-morphing capabilities show the genius of our design as Image-bearers of God. Audiologist, cognitive researcher and outspoken Christian Dr. Caroline Leaf writes, “As an individual, you are capable of making mental and emotional change in your life. Through your thinking, you can actively recreate thoughts and, therefore, knowledge in your mind.”[{4}](#)

And this has profound implications for true hope. Leaf continues: “Thoughts are real, *physical* things that occupy mental real estate. Moment by moment, every day, you are changing the structure of your brain through your thinking [it’s happening right now as you read]. *When we hope, it is an activity of the mind that changes the structure of our brain in a positive and normal direction.*”^{5} The biblical book of Hebrews defines faith as “the *substance* of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). The thankful, attentive, willfully hopeful mind creates positive emotions, thoughts, and acts of the will. In other words, we *significantly control whether we have a healthy soul.*

Dallas Willard writes, “The transformation of the self away from a life of fear and insufficiency takes place as we fix our mind upon God as he truly is.” As Scripture teaches, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In this article we’ll explore this transformation.

Morphing Your Mind—It’s Mostly Up to You!

Everyday stress is hard enough—but what about work-related anxiety? Money? Riots, memories of abuse, bullying, and abandonment? We have little control over family, culture or epidemics. But we can make amazing internal changes through our responses. Science and Scripture *agree* on this.

The transforming mind-renewal encouraged by Scripture is possible for us all, especially for people who have invited God to lead their lives. We can intentionally train our minds to reshape our brains—we are *not* perpetual victims of our past or circumstances. Nor are humans mere products of matter in motion. Dr. Caroline Leaf, author of *Switch on Your Brain*, claims that “Choice is real, and free will exists. You are able to stand outside yourself, observe your own thinking, consult with God, and [work with him to] change the negative, toxic thought or grow a healthy, positive thought. When you do this, your brain responds with a positive neurochemical rush

and structural changes that improve your intellect, health, and peace.”{6}

Even traumatic memories can be starved, defanged, broken down, and replaced. Brought into conscious awareness, they can become plastic enough to be recreated. Leaf explains that “Neurons that don’t get enough signal (that is, rehearsing of the negative event) will start firing apart, wiring apart, pulling out, and destroying the emotion attached to the trauma.” Also, desirable brain chemicals that bond and remold chemical connections, increase focus and attention, and increase feelings of peace and happiness begin to weaken traumatic memories even more. So bad memories, hatred, hurt, and other negative thoughts and emotions that form toxic beliefs: “If they stop firing together, they will no longer wire together. This leads to . . . rebuilding new ones.”{7}

Ideas have consequences and our beliefs guide our behavior. In the words of King Solomon, “As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.”{8} That is, we construct frameworks of beliefs and *then* speak and act from them.

Science seems to confirm this biblical view of self-control. Measuring magnetic fields, electrical impulses, chemical effects, photons, vibrations, and quantum energy paints a picture of intricately [networking] neurotransmitters, proteins, and energy—that is, signals—that change the brain’s landscape.{9} This “neuroplasticity [seems to be] God’s design for renewing the mind.”{10}

And there’s nothing magic about it: overcoming anxiety can be helped a lot through habits of the mind, heart, and soul.

Mindfulness & Meditation—Self-Control and Seeking God in Silent Solitude

It’s no wonder that the concept of “mindfulness” has become a “thing” these days. Meditation and concentration are new-old

survival skills. How do they work?

Dr. J.P. Moreland, noted philosopher and author of *Finding Quiet: My Story of Overcoming Anxiety and The Practices That Brought Peace*, candidly shares his struggles with anxiety and the need he had for medications. He also discovered the power of seeking God in self-directed solitude. He emphasizes sustained habits of the praising, thankful, and self-controlled soul.

Mindful meditation is not like taking a drug, is not a quick fix, or denying the senses to rid oneself of desire.^{11} “By charting new pathways in the brain, mindfulness can change the banter inside our heads from chaotic to calm.”^{12} New habits are formed over time. When it comes to our minds, “practice doesn’t make perfect; it makes permanent.”^{13}

Remaining at rest via the practice of spiritual disciplines takes advantage of our mind’s ability to “move into a highly intelligent, self-reflective, directed state.” And the more often we go there, the more “we get in touch with the deep, spiritual part of who we are.” This exercise switches brain modes in a way that can create wisdom and potential connection with God.^{14} As Jesus taught his disciples, “Keep awake (give strict attention, be cautious and active) and watch and pray, that you may not come into temptation.”^{15} We can mentor our own minds, settle our souls, habituate our hearts, and free our spirits to respond to God. Brain science is catching up on this reality.

So, what’s going on physically when we stop to meditate in focused solitude and silence? A post at *Mindful.org* claims, “The impact that mindfulness exerts on our brain is borne from routine: a slow, steady, and consistent reckoning of our realities, and the ability to take a step back, become more aware, more accepting, less judgmental, and less reactive. . . . Mindfulness over time can make the brain, and thus [ourselves], more efficient regulators, with a penchant for

pausing to respond to our world instead of mindlessly reacting.”{16} How different would social media conversations be—especially on politics and race—if more people practiced patient contemplation!

Various regions of our brains change while meditating. The “fight or flight” area actually shrinks in size.{17} It’s a real chill pill!

God keeps “him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”{18}

Thankfulness and Happiness—Healthy Habits of the Mind & Heart

In trying times, we all want to return to happiness. It’s a God-given right to pursue it, according to America’s founders. The biblical worldview recognizes the inherent brokenness of both creation and human beings, so it is no surprise that confusion, discord, and tragedy—along with evil spiritual powers—“steal, kill, and destroy”{19} our joy. What can be done?

Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland writes, “You have it in your power to begin a regimen of choices, assuming you would choose the right things, and form a habit of this that can *substantially improve your happiness and decrease or get rid of anxiety*. There really is hope.”{20} Our non-conscious mind turns thoughts over and over. Through spiritual disciplines, we bring these into our conscious awareness, which manipulates actual proteins, creating overhauled memories. Intentionally bringing God to mind—His attributes, the wonder of creation and His blessings, promises, answered prayers—such a focus leads to a cycle of good thinking, feeling, and *knowing* that turns into believing real truth. Faith is a gift so we’re not alone in doing this. But it is up to us to put to use the gifts described here to “work out [our] salvation with [reverence and proper humility].”{21}

Remember, we have a strong influence in reshaping our own brains—especially with God’s help. Secular scientists are discovering the wonderful power of thankfulness. Scientific studies prove seven benefits according to *PsychologyToday.com*. Gratitude improves relationships, physical and mental health, sleep, self-esteem, and mental resilience. It even reduces aggression, the urge for revenge. Scripture aligns with physical reality again when it tells us: “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”[{22}](#)

Moreland jokes, “If we’re not careful, we may even come to think we were designed to flourish best when we are thankful and grateful! Yet as exciting as these psychological studies are, we didn’t need them to know the importance and value of expressing gratitude and thanksgiving to God. The Bible insists on this . . . [it’s] filled to overflowing with exhortations to be grateful to God and express thanksgiving to him.”[{23}](#) As King David famously prayed in Psalm 23, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life”—he trusted a good God to lead, protect, and bless him. That’s joy far beyond happiness!

Takeaways & Practical Applications

Brain networks form an inner life of the mind. We can switch between various networks constantly. Like a mom monitoring kids running around inside several contained rooms, this enables us to control the controllable—our reactions to events and circumstances. Brain scans confirm how we capture and police rogue thoughts in ways prescribed in Scripture: “We . . . take every thought captive to obey Christ.”[{24}](#)

UCLA researchers address how our habitual non-conscious thoughts can drive anxiety—negative self-talk like:

- “I’ll be in real trouble if...”
- “What if so and so happens next week?”
- “I’ll probably fail that exam!”

“It’s what we say to ourselves in response to any particular situation that mainly determines our mood and feelings.”[{25}](#)

“Forming a new habit requires doing things you may not want to do in the early stages of formation,” as any coach or teacher will tell you.

For retraining our brains, experts have devised methods like **The Four Step Solution**:

It goes as follows:[{26}](#)

Step 1: Relabeling: call out thoughts as having no necessary connection with reality: tell yourself “That is a destructive lie.” Call on Proverbs 4:23, “Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.”[{27}](#)

Step 2: Reframing: take the power out of the bad thoughts. Reset your perception of the deceptive message by being mindful that it exists, its content, and how you are now feeling by correctly categorizing the distorted message. Bad self-talk includes:

- all or nothing thinking (for example: “it was a *total* failure”)
- overgeneralizing
- singling out one thing to focus on
- catastrophizing (or making too big a deal out of things) and
- discounting the positive

Reframing them creates stable memories formed by repeated updating.

Step 3: Refocusing: Set your mind on anything else—distract yourself from the negative thoughts. Stop obsessing! Get into “the flow” of something. Focus elsewhere. And don’t ruminate about the message—analyzing it will deepen the grooves in your brain.

Step 4: Revaluating: After a while, reflect on how you did Steps 1-3. Recommit to repeat these steps throughout the day.

Over 21 days, a “newly formed neural network” will decay in less than a month: thoughts are like muscles that atrophy and die or get stronger with use.^{28} Starve the bad, feed the good.

As Paul instructed the Philippian church, dwell on what is good and pure, true and worthy of praise.^{29}

Notes

1. Senator Ben Sasse, *Them: Why We Hate Each Other and How to Heal*, quoted by Richard Doster in Christian Healthcare Newsletter, June 2020, “Can the Church solve the country’s worst health problems?”

2. Nick Givas, Fox News, “Prescriptions for anti-anxiety meds spike amid coronavirus outbreak, new report finds,” posted April 18, 2020. www.foxnews.com/health/prescriptions-anti-anxiety-meds-spike-amid-coronavirus.

3. Amy Hollyfield, “Suicides on the rise amid stay-at-home order, Bay Area medical professionals say,” posted May 21, 2020, abc7news.com/suicide-covid-19-coronavirus-rates-during-pandemic-death-by/6201962.

4. Dr. Caroline Leaf, *Switch on Your Brain: The Key to Peak Happiness, Thinking and Health*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013, p. 19 (emphasis mine).

5. Ibid.

6. Leaf, 39.
7. Leaf, 64.
8. Proverbs 23:7.
9. Leaf, 47.
10. Leaf, 65.
11. As with Buddhist meditation practices seeking utter emptiness.
12. Jennifer Wolkin, Mindful.org, "How the Brain Changes When You Meditate," posted September 20, 2015, www.mindful.org/how-the-brain-changes-when-you-meditate.
13. J.P. Moreland, *Finding Quiet: My Story of Overcoming Anxiety and the Practices that Brought Peace*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 67.
14. Leaf, 82.
15. Matthew 26:41.
16. Ibid. Wolkin
17. Various Authors, *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, Volume 191, Issue 1, 30 January 2011, Pages 36-43. Posted Nov. 10, 2010:
www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S092549271000288X.
18. Isaiah 26:3.
19. John 10:10.
20. *Finding Quiet*, 54-55 (emphasis mine).
21. Ephesians 2:12, Amplified Bible.
22. Philippians 4: 6-7, New Living Translation.
23. *Finding Quiet*, 113.
24. 2 Corinthians 10:5.
25. Psychologists Edmund Bourne and Lorna Garano, cited by Moreland.
26. Entire section, *Finding Quiet*, p. ?
27. Proverbs 4:23, CSB.
28. Leaf, 151.
29. Philippians 4:8.

COVID Conditioning: A Viral Outbreak is (Re)Shaping Us and Our World

Byron Barlowe probes the underlying implications of the global reaction to COVID-19 from a worldview level, asking if we may be being conditioned to accept unbiblical views without realizing it.

You and I are being conditioned, you know that, right? It's a daily thing. Events and messages work on us, and we need to learn to shape them before they shape us. We must take in the right stuff to counter lies and well-intended overreach.

All of a sudden a universal and ubiquitous mind-and-heart-shaper has hit the world like an alien invasion. The tension and suspense feels like that in the film *Signs*: sitting in the basement, waiting for green "men" to creep into the boarded-up farmhouse, getting snatches of what's going on in the outside world through a baby monitor. We are covered over with everything COVID-19 virus: news of it, perhaps even the real effects of it as a sickness. But for most of us the newly-minted mandates by mayors and governors, and social pressures from friends and family stemming from the worldwide reaction is the main reality of our lives as we "shelter in place" and are bombarded with a constant stream of information. It's ruining investment portfolios—at least for now "on paper"—and skyrocketing the recently record-low unemployment numbers. People are scared for themselves and loved ones since so much is unknown.

How is all this change changing us? Materially, how will shifting norms transform public policy and law, along with our

personal beliefs? What will the upending of our economy, civic, and personal lives mean? For folks with secure jobs and schoolchildren, is it simply about getting through a few weeks of downtime and home-work, commonsense hygiene and personal contact avoidance? Or will we be forever stamped with new attitudes and convictions birthed by events beyond our control?

We are Responsible for Our Thoughts and Beliefs

Brain scientists confirm what good pastors, parents, and coaches teach: we can't necessarily control what we go through, but our reaction to it is up to us. Don't get "Corona'd"! We can either fall mindlessly into lockstep with what we're told, or to run this experience through a wise grid and conquer fear and foolishness. Cognitive researcher and Christian Dr. Caroline Leaf emphasizes the power of mental self-control: "As we think, we change the physical nature of our brain. As we consciously direct our thinking, we can wire out toxic patterns of thinking and replace them with healthy thoughts *It all starts in the realm of the mind, with our ability to think and choose—the most powerful thing in the universe after God, and indeed, fashioned after God.*"[\[1\]](#)

The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of our Creator God, acknowledged this reality when writing to the first Century Roman church and, by extension, to us today. If he were writing what became Romans 12:1-2 to contemporary folks he may have emphasized an action point first (verse 2) and expanded his words' scope to entail what early believers took for granted: God as the center of all things. Their worldview, including their view of the universe (cosmology), was hierarchical and infused with "God-ness."—Our temptation to trust in God-optional techno-science and complex government structures would be alien to our ancient Christian brethren. Yet, there were competing views of the way the seen and unseen

worlds work, so Paul's admonition to develop their new Christ-inhabited mind is just as germane today.

It might have read something like, "Do not be conditioned by the world [all that is other-than-God, the cosmos, and anti-biblical realms, including your own self-created view of the world] but be reconditioned by the total upgrading of your mind in a new operating system downloaded by the entrance of the Holy Spirit when you believed. This will help you discern how to use that new mind wholeheartedly, purely serving through your body, which is only fitting and quite pleasing as your service to the Master of created reality, Himself the 'I Am' Reality."

It's Real for Me Too

I'm not immune from the scare and worry. My smartphone just dinged: my son's second interview for his first career job set for 90 minutes from now was just cancelled. The recently thriving corporation—a very promising prospect—has frozen all hiring due to COVID-19. On the other line is a daughter who is seeking a low-income service position since her employer has no jobs in the pipeline. Our other daughter, an Intensive Care Unit nurse, feels the pressure of shortages and health risks. She posted a picture of herself in a mask and gown, disease prevention protocols called "Droplet Precautions." Their medical equipment is inadequate and has to be washed and reused. A friend's fiancé's family have all been laid off: dad, mom, and siblings. It's up to me to regulate my Corona-news intake, take my anxiety to God, and trust him. But I am determined not to be led into fear and one-sided thinking and to help others.

Mind-Conditioning: Words Matter to Our Worldview

Harsh new realities are marked by new verbiage which is always

a sign of cultural change and often a signal of improper controlling (“shelter in place,” “social distancing,” “presumptive positive,” “an abundance of caution”). Euphemisms like these mask meanings. In order of appearance, they clearly mean “Stay home, keep apart, we presume that he/she is a carrier, and we are going into high-control mode.” As philosopher Peter Kreeft writes, “Control language and you control thought; control thought and you control action; control action and you control the world.” Are you and I being conditioned to become used to changes we may not want?[\[2\]](#)

In the chaos, those of us with downtime and a biblical view of life need to use it to reflect and speak into a frightened and confused world. In the larger pluralistic community, *how we respond collectively and personally will in no small way determine the arc of our future.* As Dr. J.P. Moreland says, “Each situation in our lives is an occasion for either positive formation or negative deformation.”[\[3\]](#) Yet, this is not simply a personal matter. We are citizens and need to be active ones.

Basic assumptions about reality–worldview presuppositions we just take for granted–tend to sit like bedrock or sinkholes underneath the foundations of cultures, families, and individual lives. We either don’t know about them or ignore them, especially in hectic times of real or perceived crisis. They’re deep, unseen, and usually of no concern until events unearth them or an earthquake shakes things up. Sinkholes cause collapse. Bedrock stands.

Specific Concerns About Corona-Conditioning

Here are some concerns I have as a teacher of biblical worldview discernment as this worldwide quake rattles on:

Have we become too beholden to medical science for direction?
Every human life is infinitely precious—a very biblical stance

given that we are made in God's image, that He died for all people, and that He desires for none to perish (Genesis 1:27; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9). Yet, how does a society weigh its view of life-value versus the inevitability of sickness and death? Citizens demand a disease-free life without pain and engage in death-avoidance, then take "death with dignity"; the medical establishment pretends it can deliver all that. Can outbreaks like this be allowed to shut down entire economies and render personal freedoms moot? Only if we play along with such pretense. An international obsession with killing it ignores everything else. Will our COVID-19 response cause more harm than good? *How* one answers such concerns, not whether such dilemmas *should* happen, is at issue. Our personal worldviews and collective societal constructs—which we can help change—will determine controllable outcomes. We will not determine uncontrollable.

This is *not* to say that public health decrees are wrong in principle nor to necessarily question at least some of those being decreed in this situation, for example voluntary at-home work and study. *Repeating louder this time: I am not saying a massive and unusual response is bad or wrong in and of itself.* Nevertheless, history is absolute regarding the exercise of such power—it almost never regresses. 9-11 and subsequent one-off attempted terrorist acts put in place onerous rules for air passengers that look permanent. Progress, in this sense, may be regress if it unrealistic and ill-conceived.

Conditioning Reality Itself?

Is Modern mankind seeking to short-circuit reality and its consequences? This is the biggest underlying issue. There's something new in the air: near-unanimous mass morality based in rapidly fueled public opinion further fed by transnational fear. I call it "CoronaVirus Virus." So far, epidemiologists and medical scientists are calling the shots for a global society. Pundits pump up the hype before we can know. Public

peer pressure (along with corporate acquiescence and promotion) guarantee an unquestioning going-along for most people and institutions.

We constantly hear and read the phrase, "It's just the right thing to do." This orientation raises the question, "Why is it the right thing to do? What is the moral grounding for that decision?" "The greater good" is the mantra of a [utilitarian](#) worldview that eventually erases the kind of individual freedom of moral agents which Scripture honors. The people in power decide what is good for all the rest. In a pluralistic society like ours, the privileging of choice was traditionally baked into the very fabric of public policy. Law allows leeway for disputable matters of conscience—at least they did before the advent of "hate crimes" which require God-like knowledge of motives. Such fundamental precepts of liberty have long been eroding. In this new Corona-driven milieu, dictates like government ordered shuttering of businesses and stay-at-home decrees means they may never be fully regained. Let's at least realize this, even if the calculus of health-risk mitigation over civil liberty wins the day.

Then there's the prospect of the next pandemic. Some virus is surely incubating for debut next year. Will this draconian level be the new standard of response? How will our economy or that of the world (who often follow our lead) survive under such control?

"What, again, is government's role?"

Who is pausing even for a moment to ask about various requirements, "Is this a bridge too far?" That leads to the other great concern: the directives from medical science's mass diagnosis-for-the-world are, of course, implemented by government. But [the biblical view of the role of government](#) is pretty much limited to policing and making war. Admittedly, society and hence, government has multiplied in complexity—an unbiblical situation given the limits mentioned—therefore

public health and economic interventions are somewhat necessary. Absolutely, there are critical emergency situations and this is one of them. It would be unconscionable to allow an epidemic to spread willy-nilly on its own.

However, again, is anyone hitting Pause to ask how far is too far? One hopes that in retrospect, this crisis engenders a throttling back and overturning of policies that helped us get in this pickle (e.g., Federal Reserve-mandated interventions and supposed fixes which are being implemented again; also, allowing a Communist foreign nation a choke hold on pharmaceutical and medical supply chains to gain the “common good” of cheap goods while caregivers do without). Government solutions for all of life. Did we vote this in? Will we do it again in November?

Government Tyranny in Sight?

Most worrisome is a move toward what appears more like a police state. In Jordan, missionaries report that 400 people have been arrested for leaving their apartments. [Refugee relief workers cobble together care](#) in an impossible situation. A Kentucky man was kept in his home somehow after he refused to *self-isolate* (another new term in the popular vernacular)—I don't know the details. That spooked me. I wish he cared enough to stay away from people, but when it comes down to it, he could be shot in his own neighborhood—presumably on his own property—for leaving. Explain that to your six-year-old. A *shelter in place* order for all counties surrounding Kansas City is to be enforced by police. Cops deciding to fine or arrest you for leaving your home for other than trips to the doctor, grocery store, or cleaners? Politicians telling us what's essential may be necessary but seems arbitrary at best. Talk of state borders closing for a sickness? This is a novel consideration, far as I know! Does the Coronavirus rise to the level of a nuclear fallout situation? Is this our shared future? As author and

apologist Dr. Ken Boa asks (in a personal email), “Given the nature of interconnectivity in a digital world, we now live within plausible sight of a fear-induced technological plague that could lead to a totalitarian outcome.”

Choices, Not Conditioned Responses

Again, all I am asking is, “Does the necessity of this drastic a world-changing meta-response go without saying? Could a relatively restrained response now be wise—despite the public relations suicide of facing a sometimes mad mob morality?” On the other hand, “Is freedom—economic and cultural—worth more lives? Whose feet would that be laid at? Politicians? The medical establishment (they are simply doing their calling)? Fate’s? God’s?”

If the choice is between saving every possible life and forever changing life itself for earth’s entire population, where is the middle ground and how does a society find it? That boat has sailed, I fear. Relativistic, ever-changing ideals and their progressive promotion have won the day. The mindset of “We are going to win this thing, no matter the cost!” reigns triumphant in headlines.

There’s a worldview at work—learn to notice it: note the irony of a Postmodern relativism entwined with a Modernist certainty regarding mankind’s ability to control what used to be called an “act of God.” That’s what the highly moralistic and humanistic [John Mauldin](#) is unabashedly promoting, I believe. One more mass-mediated call to controlling an out of control universe. As if we could.

Be At Peace, Christian, And Spread That Peace

For individual believers, a biblically realistic and optimistic response is to shelter in place (“abide in Me”). Rest in the peace and assurance of a loving, sovereignly

overseeing Creator who will make all things right someday, whose agenda is being met. The best outward response toward unbelievers is to share not only the certainty of that hope, but the gospel that leads to hope in a disease-free, worry-free, perfectly functional and loving society of brother and sisters in Christ. Eternal perspective is the conditioning we must seek. Because we're all being conditioned. It is truly a daily thing.

Meanwhile, pray for the individuals in charge and their decision-making to be sound. As a new normal reconditions minds and hearts around the globe at the speed of Internet connections, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed" by the mind of Christ (Romans 12:2).

Notes

1. Dr. Caroline Leaf, *Switch on Your Brain: The Key to Peak Happiness, Thinking, and Health*, p. 20, emphasis mine.
2. www.azquotes.com/quote/1333869, accessed 3/23/2020.
3. J.P. Moreland, *Finding Quiet: My Story of Overcoming Anxiety and the Practices That Brought Peace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

How Can I Make God Answer My Prayers My Way?

How can I get God to give me what I want? That's often at the root of our interest in prayer. If we're honest, that's the question we want answered when we read books on prayer, listen to a message or podcast on prayer, or talk to people known as prayer warriors.

Instead of New Year's Resolutions

Fill in the blank: New Year's _____.

You probably either supplied "Eve" or "Resolutions," right?

Resolutions are intentions that may last days or weeks, but so often they peter out before we even get used to using the new year in our dates. May I suggest that instead of forming resolutions, we spend time asking some powerfully insightful questions that will help us evaluate ourselves truthfully and helpfully?

Here are three questions that many community/accountability groups ask each other regularly (as in, weekly):

What am I doing to feed myself (spiritually)? *How am I spending time in God's word and other sources of spiritual truth and wisdom such as books?*

What am I doing to feed my flesh? *How am I indulging my appetites and desires in ways that glorify myself instead of God?*

What am I doing to feed others? *How am I pointing others to Christ and helping them grow spiritually?*

My pastor at Watermark Community Church-Plano, Kyle Kaigler, is especially good at pointed questions. Every morning, as he thinks back on the previous day, he examines himself in four areas:

Where was I hooked? (caught in a bad habit that controls me)

Where was I cold? (being so self-focused that I failed to be

loving and kind to those around me)

Where was I scared? (allowing my fear of man to keep me from saying and doing the things I should be)

Where was I proud? (taking credit for what God did)

(Pastor Tim Keller asks these same questions: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/help-with-prayer-simple-clear-gospel-devotion-from-tim-keller/>)

Kyle also offers these questions:

John Piper says that “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” So, looking back over the last 12 months:

What are the most God-glorifying occasions over this past year that came from finding satisfaction in Him? *When was I moved to erupt in gratitude and praise for what God did in my life? Were there sweet moments of deep connection with others, or a “lightbulb moment” when He revealed truth to me in a way that zapped lies and wrong beliefs? Were there moments of realizing I was just immersed in His goodness?*

What was a distraction to the glory of God? *In what areas of my life is my stubborn affinity for my flesh, getting my way, insisting on staying in my comfort zone, serving like mud that covers up “Christ in me, the hope of glory”? Where did my entrenched habits (such as continually checking my phone) function like a stop sign, keeping God at a distance? How have I tuned Him out so that I miss the ways He wants to nudge me, direct me, lead me through the day?*

Here are some helpful spiritual assessment questions:

What has God been teaching me in His word? We should be recording the things the Holy Spirit is showing us in our time in His word so we can remind ourselves of His lessons and insights. Otherwise we are the guy from James 1 who looks in a

mirror and then turns away, thoughtlessly unaware of what he looks like.

How's my time with the Lord?

- a. Consistent and meaningful (It's ok to choose this option)
- b. Consistent but not so meaningful (I am faithful to go before the Lord but I leave the time unfulfilled)
- c. Inconsistent but meaningful (I don't do it very often but when I do, He is faithful to meet me there)
- d. Inconsistent and not meaningful (it's just not happening)

(If a or c) **How is God transforming my life?** What is God revealing about Himself and His desire for my life? How is my heart being changed to more faithfully follow where He is leading? What have I surrendered (or still working on surrendering) to Jesus' control? How is my life changing so He is increasing, and I am decreasing?

(If b or d) **What are the barriers to consistent and meaningful time with God?** (Busyness, worldliness, selfishness, sin—lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, sinful pride of life)

Am I sharing my story of how Jesus Christ changed my life?

Am I being a good steward of the body God gave me?

Am I being a good steward of the resources He has given me?

And finally, again thanks to Kyle, here are some interesting survey questions for family members:

Spouse survey

1. What were the best memories that we made together this year as a *couple*?
2. What were the best memories that we made together this year as a *family*?
3. What would you consider the key challenges we faced as a family this past year? What about in our marriage?

4. If someone were to ask you, "Describe your current marriage relationship." What would you say and why?
5. If you could change anything about last year, what would it be and why?
6. Based on the experiences that we have had as a couple and as a family, what have you learned about God and His work in our lives?
7. What are 3 trips or activities that you would enjoy doing together this next year?
8. What do I do that really ministers to you and you would love it if I did it more?
9. What are your top fears/concerns for each of our children?

Kid Survey

1. What have been some of the best times you have had with me this past year?
2. If you had to give me some advice on being a better parent, what would it be and why?
3. What are some things that you would like to talk with me about and why?
4. What are some of your fears that you would like me to pray for you about?
5. What is something that you would like to do with me?
6. How can I help you grow as a Christian?
7. As you consider conversations and time together as a family over the past year, what new things have you learned or understood more about God?

I think these powerful questions, answered thoughtfully and truthfully, will serve us better than any New Years Resolution we've ever made.

This blog post originally appeared at

What Does Trusting God Look Like?

When friends are frozen by fear and anxiety, I often suggest they recite Psalm 56:3 over and over: “When I am afraid, I will trust in You.”

But what does it mean to trust God? What does it look like in real life? How do we understand *how* to trust Him?

I recently asked this question on Facebook and was deeply blessed by the wisdom and experience of friends who have learned how to trust God in the refining fires of life in a fallen world.

One scripture reference was cited again and again, probably the best go-to verse on trusting God, Proverbs 3:5-6:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will direct your paths.

Verse 3 is a parallelism, a Hebrew form of idea rhyming, where two ideas are complementary sides of the same coin, so to speak. *Trusting in the Lord with all your heart* means *not leaning on our own understanding*. If we’re not leaning on our own understanding, that means leaning on God’s understanding—and His character, and His goodness, and His love. *Acknowledging Him in all our ways* means continually orienting ourselves toward Him the way a plant turns to the

light. And choosing, DELIBERATELY choosing, to refuse to lean on our own understanding, leaning hard into Him instead.

So trust is a kind of leaning, transferring our weight onto someone or something else.

I get leaning.

30 years ago I started using a cane because my weak polio leg was only going to get weaker. It was amazing how much more instant stability I had. Which is what happens when we lean on God.

So trusting means CHOOSING.

We make one initial choice to lean into God instead of ourselves, especially when life doesn't make sense, and then we continue to practice making that choice over and over.

I think there are three aspects of trusting God: Making the initial choice to trust Him, reminding ourselves of what is true, and continuing to choose to trust.

Choosing to Trust

Trust starts with a definitive, intentional decision to “step over the line” by turning from doing things our way, trusting in ourselves and our own understanding, to transfer our dependence to God. Here's a word of wisdom concerning not relying on ourselves and our own understanding [read: manipulating]: “Trust is living without scheming.”

One wise friend shared, “Trust is the expectation of good based on the character of God. I remind myself in the middle of the muddle: ‘This story is not over yet.’”

Have you ever seen scared little children pressing hard into their parents? It's what they do to their mommies and daddies because it's the nature of emotionally healthy children to trust their parents, especially when they're scared.

Pressing hard is a picture of trust.

Trusting happens when we realize, "I am not in control. I release my illusion of control and give the reins over to the Lord."

One friend wrote, "There's usually a point where you have to admit you no longer have the reins. For me, I can recall specific instances where I have said, 'Lord, whatever will bring You the most glory . . . [do it.]' It's like something in the spiritual realm is released when we allow God to be God in our lives."

I love that she used the word "released." That is such a powerful concept. I'm taken to Matthew 11:28-30—"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Releasing the weariness and burden of trying to run our own lives in our own strength onto Jesus is how we enter His rest, which we only get on the other side of trusting.

Along the same lines, trusting God looks like relinquishing worries and anxieties, rolling them over into Jesus' more-than-capable hands, and then choosing to leave them there. ("No, I'm not going to worry about that, I gave it to Jesus on Tuesday at 3:14 p.m.")

One of my fellow Bible study leaders shared this gem:

"I learned to swing dance about a year before becoming a believer and one of the ways my partner and I would practice was for me to be blindfolded. I had a tendency to anticipate the moves that he would lead as opposed to letting him lead me and I was unintentionally hijacking his lead—very often. The blind fold made me wait, listen, and not anticipate. He was able to lead me through combinations I would have never been able to imagine (he was a much more experienced dancer than

me). In my early walk, as I disciplined myself to walk with the Lord, I would reflect on my experience with dancing blindfolded and it gave me great courage to trust Him through things unseen.”

So trusting means choosing with the heart and mind, “I will follow YOU, Lord!”

One more picture of what trusting God looks like. Several friends responding to my Facebook post invoked the idea of *clinging* to Him, “even when it’s scary and life doesn’t appear to make sense. Knowing that, even in the hard times, He is working to perfect us, to grow us, to give us hope, and to bring glory, through us, to Himself. It means the assurance that He has the big picture of His plan in sight and everything He allows/ordains for me is a piece of that.”

Maybe nobody understands the concept of “clinging” like the tourist who discovered his harness wasn’t attached to the frame of his hang glider. He literally had to hang on to the frame for dear life for his harrowing two-minute flight.



What a picture of trust as clinging!

Trust is a lovely “holy stubbornness” in clinging to God’s goodness and sovereignty no matter how we feel, just as the hang glider stubbornly clung to the frame of his glider.

Reminding Ourselves of What is True

Once we've made the choice to trust God, we need to keep on trusting. The way we build our trust is to remind ourselves, over and over and over, of trustworthy truths about God:

- God is good.
- He will never leave us.
- He loves us.
- He is in control.
- He never makes mistakes.
- He can be trusted.

The continual process of trusting God is not only speaking the truth to ourselves, but reminding ourselves of His faithfulness in the past. That's why it's good to keep a journal—one friend keeps what she calls her “brag book” about God. I call mine a “God Sightings Book.” We can also build an “altar” (something physical that serves as a reminder of what God did, such as planting a tree).

I love what one friend said: “Trusting God means that I actively, willfully refuse to worry and instead I fix my gaze on Christ and recite to myself Who Scripture reveals Him to be, His promises, and everything He has already done.”

Another friend has been faithfully slogging through a long period of not seeing what God is doing: “Trusting God means trying to keep a posture of ‘open hands, eyes up’ and a curiosity that has us constantly wondering aloud, ‘What are you up to, God? We can't wait to see.’”

I love how she and her husband live out their trust: *OK, Lord, we can trust You or we can freak out and make things happen on our own. That would be stupid. So let's go back to thanking You for the details of how You are proving Yourself faithful day after day. We trust You by NOT taking matters into our own hands. We trust You by continuing to wait.*

Another friend drew on two different ways for her husband and her to make it through a particularly tough challenge: “One

was to say out loud and mean it: 'Lord, we choose to trust in You through this.'" They would also repeat 2 Chronicles 20:12—"Lord, we don't know what to do, but our eyes are on You."

Continuing to Choose to Trust

So trust starts out as a choice to lean into God instead of ourselves, and it continues as we remind ourselves of WHAT is true, and that HE is true.

But trust sinks its roots down deep into our hearts and souls as we continue to choose dependence on the Lord instead of ourselves. There has to be an "on-goingness" to real trust, because it's not a one-time decision, but an ongoing position built by continual choices to keep on trusting.

One mama friend was shocked and rocked to learn her baby would be born with Down Syndrome. She wrote,

"Since having [my daughter], God has grown my trust in Him immensely. For me, trusting God means to really know His heart, His goodness, His love for me and my children, and knowing He has a perfect plan . . . even when He doesn't swoop in and make things easier. Trusting God is a daily relationship talking, listening, and praying with Him. Even when circumstances don't change and life is and will be difficult. Even when you see your child suffer—trusting Him looks like having an eternal focus, not an earthly one.

"Trusting Him looks like your 6-month old having heart surgery and meditating on worship music to remind you of His goodness and love. It's choosing him over and over again no matter if His plan aligns with yours."

I responded to her, "My takeaway from your absolutely precious post is that trust can look like a kind of 'holy stubbornness' of choosing, over and over, to lash ourselves to a good and loving God who has proven His faithfulness over and over.

Despite circumstances which only tend to obscure, not define, ultimate reality." I love to see evidences of that "holy stubbornness" in people!

Another friend pointed out that wavering trust can mean going off-track into the weeds of feelings. (Which are valuable as indicators of what's going on in our hearts, but are terrible indicators of truth! Feelings are like the warning lights on the dashboards of our cars, but they make awful compasses...)

"When my trust in God wavers even the least little bit, I have a tendency to lean toward my emotions. Not that emotions aren't valid and valuable, but when they begin to lead my thoughts, it can throw everything haywire. I start believing lies. The only antidote is seeking and speaking His Truth over every feeling—I suppose it's what the Scripture calls "taking every thought captive." I love the vivid language there: I can picture this tall strong person (the statement of Truth) coming up to one of my gone-wild feelings with a pair of handcuffs and shouting, 'You're under arrest!' I'm a visual person and sometimes this is what grappling in prayer looks like for me."

There is no passivity in trusting God. It's a very active way of choosing to think and remember and maintain our position of dependence on Him. In the book *Surrender to Love*, David Benner writes about teaching a group of non-swimmers how to snorkel. Because they had learned to trust him as a spiritual teacher, and they had learned the spiritual principle of surrender, they were willing to enter the water and let go of the side of the boat. They trusted him when he told them they would float. They trusted him when he told them they could breathe through the snorkel without having to lift their heads out of the water.

Trusting God is like getting out of the boat, donning the snorkel, and trusting that the water will hold you up while you breathe with your face in the water.

It's leaning,

It's clinging.

It's releasing and relinquishing into God's hands.

And, at its core, trusting God is saying, "Thy will be done."
Enjoy.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_does_trusting_god_look_like
on November 19, 2019.

Scraping Ceilings and Souls: Lessons on Sanctification From a Home Improvement Project

The process of upgrading and repairing Byron Barlowe's home helped him to see how God does the same kind of transformation in the souls of Christ-followers.

My wife and I are living in a suspended state of misery in our own home. It's like camping in a plastic-lined dustbin after a tornado blew furniture and books into random piles. Hidden in every crevice there's a thin fog of whitish dust and snow that won't melt. "How long, O Lord?" This odyssey started as we launched a long-awaited kitchen remodel, which would be stress enough: "Where's that sink they took out with the bulk waste—we need it back until the granite people come to install the new one!" Camping indoors again.

But then we succumbed to the contractor's compelling sell-job on removing popcorn from our ceilings—you know, that lumpy stuff hanging from 20th century ceilings. "They'll get it done and clean it up for you." No sweat, right? Right!

Anyone who's lived through a major renovation or addition can testify to the disturbance. It's an all-encompassing project. "How many more trips to Home Depot?" I'm at the library writing this and will head to the shower at the YMCA. The paint makes it hard to sleep. Finally, we left for vacation. Disruption of routines and an exploded sense of place overwhelms and badgers us.

Yet God is in it. The ordeal is bringing out loads of attitudes and frustrations in me, especially since God seems to be doing an *attitude renovation* within me simultaneously. Is that dual lesson cruel of God, or spiritually strategic? Do I really grow when things sail smoothly along?

Yes, the promise of a new look and feel gets lost in the temporary tiresomeness of it all. The more you have, the more you pay in so many ways! Yet, what we had was not up to grade. Some of it was poised to cause disaster, like some plumbing in our kitchen. Replacing the working fridge with a cooler one (accidental pun) revealed a faulty valve. It had to be replaced. In the same way, my soul needs a makeover.

Like a master plumber, the Lord needs to hook up the new pipes of grace he has for me. He's renovating my heart. I need to grow into the new creation I already am. New openings for new blessings, old things made new. Getting hung up on my way of seeing issues or settling for an inadequate view of God's goodness calls for a major overhaul. The Lord is committed to make this happen as I somewhat grudgingly lay my life before him in submission—again. It hurts and is a mess, like the unexpected plumbing issue. But like the fridge fix, it makes possible a bounty of unspoiled fruit and prevents a nasty flood!

Back to the originally intended project: the process for the ceiling redux is a multi-step process. It requires the following:

- **scraping**: complete with the roar of compressor to spray water, a sharp scraper, and the old junk that falls to floor (and into everything) like oatmeal or, well, wet popcorn
- **“mud”** to fill holes and fix gouges, a lot like grout for tile or what painters do with picture hanger holes
- **texture** for a new, updated look, smoother than the stuff from the days of puffy hairdos and disco music!
- And **paint** to “top” it off and complete the enjoyable and more livable change.

Simple processes aside, the disarray and disruption of either kind of renovation cannot be overstated. Every last physical item, habit, and way of life has been overturned, from sleeping to showering, eating to breathing itself. Repeat after me, self: *temporary pain for years of gain*. And isn't that what spiritual growth is like? Is it worth it? This is the operative question each time the Lord convicts us of sin or a character issue. Sanctification—the project of turning us into the real likeness of Christ—promises *eternal* reward and glory! It showcases the goodness and truth of God. Maturity matters, even though its development stinks at efficiency and convenience from a human perspective.

Because negative thought patterns burn into our minds and even have bodily effects, they need to be peeled off, removed. Kind of like the dragon skin of the character Eustace, the unbearably cynical and snooty boy character in C.S. Lewis's *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. His spiritual blindness and insensitivity had to go but was painful to remove. Sin sticks and separates us from God, goodness and others. Due to its toxic spiritual effects, transformation can't be kept waiting. We, like young Eustace, need to release our sense of

entitlement and thanklessness, rid ourselves of a false sense of pleasure and pride. He have to grow new skin. We too must be scraped over, repaired, remade and painted afresh.

What does this spiritual scraping of sanctification look like in more detail? Well, not unlike ceiling refurbishment in so many ways.

Necessary Disruption

First, like those old popcorn ceilings, coverings in my soul simply must be replaced, and not for reasons of fashion. *Scraping ceilings and hearts is inconvenient*—the workers are in our house all day. The Lord does his work while we do our lives. There is never a “good time” for it. You just have to suck it up and have your life turned around a bit. I have been forced, in no small part by dealing with contractors and suppliers, to wrestle down thoughts like, “People are clueless—I wish they’d smarten up and pay attention.” While there is truth behind those convictions as we all know, people have reasons for distraction and the unredeemed have no choice but to be self-centered and confused. The Lord has been revealing what it means to “value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). When my protective and cynical dragon skin layers are removed, I begin to appreciate how gentle and ordered others’ minds can be. Their skills and especially their ability to roll with messy, changeable situations amazes me. They are better than me at a lot of things. Regardless of my perceptions, God sees them as priceless and since he loves me supremely, so I can afford to regard them as more important than myself.

Healing Takes Time, Repetition

Second, *filling in the holes and cracks means going over the same “ground” again*. It’s detailed work and has to set up and dry before you can move on. This does not feel efficient, yet it ensures that things are permanently restored. Often, the soulish equivalent of this comes in the form of deep

fellowship and counseling—filling in the injury done to our souls with solid truth and love. The old becomes new again, the cracked smooth, the damaged healed. “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” (Psalm 51:12).

The Grace of Preparation and Protection

In fact, prepping the house took the most time: taping plastic to the floor, draping furniture and ceiling fans, disconnecting light fixtures and removing air vents. It’s as if the protection of our belongings and dwelling takes precedence over the new look and underlying stuff. Isn’t this God’s way? As his Spirit renovates our lives, he lines us with protective layers of grace and love, draping us with the encouragement of prayers he evokes on our behalf and the love of fellow Christ-followers.

Renovation Takes Force

Third, just like ceiling overhauls, *retexturing* is yet another wearying pass over the same square footage for the purpose of renewal—and *it has to be forced*. Workers hold a little orange plastic tank attached to a hose that’s hooked up to a compressor, then spray the new coating on the freshly prepared surface. The pneumatic motor kicks into a whining screech that fills the house. Without that push, the spray can’t come out of the nozzle ten feet in the air. Similarly, the Spirit’s regeneration of our souls is noisy, messy, pushy and downright unpleasant. We may tire of reaching up to do our part in spreading newness onto the same surface from which God has removed the old stuff. Our shoulders and hearts get exhausted, sore from holding up our part of the work. The air is a bit nasty to breathe. But if our new life is to be realized, it has to be done, forcibly.

The Stuff of Spiritual Renovation

Just what is such *spiritual newness*? The material used is

God's Word illumined by his Spirit, creating new pathways for our minds, hearts and wills, right down to the bone and marrow of our beliefs. It means filling our minds with "whatever is true . . . honorable . . . right, . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good repute . . . any excellence [and] anything worthy of praise" (Philippians 4:8), being "transformed" and "renewed" in our minds (Romans 12:1-2), reckoning (deciding to be so) ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans

6:11). All of these fresh Spirit-pumped coatings can cover our internal overheads with new, living realities. That is, thinking and believing in a life-giving outlook that takes seriously the promise that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) is the ultimate renewal. Now, the house has a new sky, if you will, and the sun is ready to shine a bit brighter. As we capitulate to the often onerous process of scraping, mudding, and texturing, we experience a brand new covering for ceilings and souls-in-Christ. And now for the *coup de grace*!

New Paint, New Spiritual Robes

Painting is the final stage of this household transformation. Gone are the ugly, useless bits, replaced with the smoothness of shalom—peace-filled blessedness—where defects get filled in and fixed as we submit to the work. Likewise, as we are molded into Christ's likeness, we put on robes of pure white righteousness (Revelation 19:8; 3:4). So much can be said about the glory of holiness produced in willing saints. Suffice to say that the glory that awaits us outshines even the brightest hues applied to earthly surfaces. Our spiritual man is growing brighter, even as our bodies break down and fade. "We do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Many of us have ceilings that overhang us with old, outdated

looks. All believers in Christ have rooms—perhaps whole houses—that need reworking. Let the scraping begin. It's worth it!

What Difference Does the Resurrection Make?

Sue Bohlin suggests four ways the resurrection of Jesus can make a difference in the lives of believers today.

What difference does the resurrection make—in our lives? It's the most important event in all of human history. Where's the "so what" for today?

I meditated on this question for weeks, eventually creating a list too long for this blog post. So let me share my favorites.

All pain and suffering will be redeemed and resolved.

I've [lived in a body with a disability](#) since I got polio at eight months old and was paralyzed from the waist down. I got some use of my left leg and hip back, but I had to wear a steel and leather brace for the first several years of my life. Every step I've taken, I have limped. I had several orthopedic surgeries and 14 years of physical therapy.

We used to sing a song in church that made me cry Every. Single. Time.

You Hold Me Now {1}

For eternity

All my heart will give

All the glory to Your Name

No weeping, no hurt or pain
No suffering
You hold me now
You hold me now

No darkness, no sick or lame
No hiding, You hold me now
You hold me now

The first time I walk without a limp will be in my resurrected body, in heaven where there will be no polio, no weakness, no limping. There will be no scooters in heaven. No wheelchairs. No walkers.

No insulin pumps.
No percussion vests for cystic fibrosis.
No cochlear implants for the deaf.
No braille books or signs for the blind.
No dentures or dental implants.
No prosthetics.

All the technology and tools we have developed to help people deal with life in a fallen, broken world will be obsolete and never needed again. The fallen, broken world will be resurrected too! Full of glory and beauty and strength and perfection.

What difference does the resurrection make? It affects [how I live through times of pain and suffering](#). I know I can bear it if there is a purpose and God is going to make everything right.

The resurrection means all pain and suffering is temporary, and there is meaning to it.

The resurrection means God sustains me through the difficult times because He is doing a beautiful thing in me that I will only be able to see and appreciate in my resurrection body.

A second difference the resurrection makes is that *heaven is real, so we don't have to fear death.*

The resurrection means that if we are believers, if we have trusted in Christ, when we cross over from life on earth to life in heaven, we will be with Jesus and with all the people, starting with Adam and Eve, who put their trust in Him.

It means we can look forward to being reunited with our loved ones who have died.

I'm looking forward to seeing my daughter Becky again. She's been with Jesus 42 years. I'm looking forward to being there when our sons Curt and Kevin meet their sister, who was born and died before they came along. I'm looking forward to seeing my mom and dad, my grandparents and other family members, including my wonderful cousin George who just moved to heaven last week.

We can look forward to meeting super distant family members and even people we heard about but never met, like the apostles and Saint Augustine and Corrie Ten Boom and Billy Graham.

And since heaven is real, it means we don't have to fear death.

When we put our trust in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, death is merely a doorway into the next life. We leave our bodies and step across the threshold of heaven to be with Jesus.

There are so many stories of what a difference the resurrection makes in the life of a believer as they face death!

Recently I posted a question on Facebook asking friends to share dying stories of heaven-bound believers. I got so many delightful responses!

“My friend Charla was a hospice nurse for many years. She tells of one man, O.J., on his deathbed. His best friend, Floyd, had gone to heaven several years earlier. O.J. had been comatose for a day or so. Charla said he was peaceful and close to death as she sat with him, holding his hand and speaking soothing words to him. All of a sudden, with his eyes still closed, O.J. broke into a brilliant smile, lifted his other hand up into the air and said expectantly, ‘Floyd!’ and he went right to heaven! Charla said she’d held his hand on Earth as Floyd grasped his hand in heaven.”

“In the last moments of my father’s life, he was beaming with joy as he saw his friends on the other side waiting for him. He held up his hands, greeting them by name, ‘Brother Harold! Brother Bob!’”

3 weeks before my believing aunt passed, she saw her husband who had died several years before, in white robes reaching out his arms to her. Then while in the hospital, Aunt Rose walked by a statue of Jesus and paused as if talking to him. My cousin asked, “Mom, are you talking to Jesus?”

She said, “Yes, and He said, ‘Hang in there Rosie, you’ll be with Me shortly.’” A few days later, she told my cousins what she was seeing as the curtain between heaven and earth grew more and more transparent.

She exclaimed that heaven was so beautiful, so filled with warmth and kindness. Her daughter asked her if it was like Hawaii and she laughed and said, “No, it’s like a warm summer afternoon in Wisconsin.” The week she died, she started seeing Jesus in a white robe, and then the day before she died the robe turned gold. That night she told my cousin, “Go to bed. You’re keeping me from meeting Jesus.” She died several hours later.

What difference does the resurrection make? It means when loved ones die, it’s just a “see you later” rather than a

forever goodbye.

It means that as you get rolled from pre-op to the operating room and get ready to undergo anesthesia, you can relax in peace knowing that if anything were to go wrong during surgery, you'd wake up in heaven.

It means being legitimately concerned about the dying process hurting, but not concerned about what happens one minute after death.

The resurrection means death has been robbed of its power and its sting.

Another difference the resurrection makes is that ***we become more aware of the unseen, eternal world.***

Since Jesus said He had come from heaven, and that He would rise from the dead in 3 days—*and then He did!*—that validates everything He taught about the unseen and eternal dimension of life.

We can become more aware of the fact that we live in two worlds at the same time, the seen and physical world and the unseen spiritual world (2 Corinthians 4:18).



I love to snorkel in the Caribbean. I love being able to look at the beautiful fish and corals of the underwater world while effortlessly breathing the air of the above-water world. I love functioning in two worlds at the same time.

What difference does the resurrection make? It means we can

operate in two worlds simultaneously.

It means we can learn to focus on the unseen, eternal realm as more real than the temporal realm.

It means we can intentionally become so much more effective in our prayers because we start to see we truly do release God's power into other people's lives and situations when we pray.

Operating in two realms at the same time means we can sit in our living rooms and release the light of God's truth and power into legal and political situations in our nation's capital.

We can be walking or driving in our cars wherever we are and pour the grace of God's power into the hearts of persecuted Christians on the other side of the world.

We can read or hear the news on the internet or the newspaper and lift up events and needs and problems to the throne of God no matter where they are.

The resurrection means we can wear "invisible snorkel gear" and operate in the earthly realm and the spirit realm at the same time.

A final difference the resurrection makes is that ***we will be married to Christ.***

The church, the body of Christ, will be married to our heavenly bridegroom Jesus.

The greatest earthly marriages are still only a foretaste of the ultimate, perfect marriage between the Bride of Christ and the Lamb.

The best, healthiest earthly marriages are still between two broken, fallen sinners who hurt and irritate and annoy each other and are in constant need of forgiveness.

The very best marriages are not ultimately fulfilling and completing because only Jesus can fill and complete us. There are still times of loneliness and not being understood and wondering, “Is this as good as it gets?” Yes, because earthly marriages are not the ultimate purpose of your life.

If you are single, even if by God’s grace you are content in your singleness, there is still a longing for connection that eludes you on earth because you were made for a deep and perfect union and connection with Jesus.

What difference does the resurrection make? It means we will be bound up with the rest of the body of Christ to become His bride.

And these three differences that the resurrection make, I believe, are only the tip of the iceberg.

1. Hillsong Music, words and music by Joel Houston & Aodhan King

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_difference_does_the_resurrection_make
on April 16, 2019.

**Spiritual Warfare – Applying
A Biblical Worldview**

Perspective

Kerby Anderson provides a concise, biblical worldview perspective on the important topic of spiritual warfare. Every Christian needs to understand that our battle is against spiritual forces not against other humans, who need Christ.

He gives us practical advice on understanding our spiritual weapons and applying them to take on the forces of Satan in this world.



Spiritual Warfare

Lots of books have been written about spiritual warfare. Most of them share anecdotes and experiences of the authors or the people they ministered to. In this article I merely want to answer the question, what is a biblical point of view on spiritual warfare? (For more information on this topic, see Kerby Anderson, [A Biblical Point of View on Spiritual Warfare](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009).

✘ Spiritual warfare affects everyone. In fact, the day someone becomes a Christian, they are already involved in spiritual warfare. There is no place you can escape from this warfare. There are no “safe zones” or “secure bunkers” where you can hide.

Sadly, many Christians do not even know there is a spiritual war taking place around them. They may even become a spiritual casualty and never understand what has happened to them.

So many Christians have become mortally wounded in the spiritual conflict that takes place around them. They may be so emotionally spent or spiritually dead that they are essentially no longer of any use to God.

Others may have less serious wounds from this spiritual

conflict, but are still affected by the battle. They still go about the Christian life but are not as effective as they could be because of the “battle scars” they carry with them.

Jesus never promised that the Christian life would be easy. In fact, He actually warned us of the opposite. He says in John 16:33 that “in this world you will have trouble.”

Anyone who takes even a brief look at the history of Christianity knows that is true. Jesus was beaten and crucified. Most of the disciples died martyrs deaths. Millions of Christians were persecuted throughout history.

Christians today suffer persecution in many lands, and all of us wake up to a spiritual battle every day. That is why we need to be prepared for battle.

So where does this battle take place? Actually the Bible teaches that spiritual warfare takes place in various places in heaven and on earth.

First, we should remember that God dwells above in the heavens. Psalm 8:1 says that God has displayed His splendor above the heavens. Psalm 108:4-5 says God’s lovingkindness is great above the heavens and that He is exalted above the heavens.

The Bible also talks about the battle in the heavens. When a passage in Scripture talks about heaven, it may be referring to one of three places: (1) The first heaven is what we would call the atmosphere, (2) The second heaven is where the angels fly and do battle (Revelation 12:4-12; 14:6-7), and (3) the third heaven is also called “Paradise” and is what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 12: 2-4:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart

from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

Spiritual warfare also takes place below the heavens and on earth. This occurs on the face of the earth (Genesis 6:1; Acts 17:26) where Satan prowls like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). And it will also take place in hell and the bottomless pit (Revelation 9:1-2; 20:1-3) and at the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20; 20:10-15) where final judgment will take place.

Spiritual Battles

Spiritual warfare is the spiritual battle that takes place in the unseen, supernatural dimension. Although it is unseen by humans, we can certainly feel its effects. And we are to battle against spiritual forces in a number of ways.

First, we need to realize that the weapons of this warfare are not human weapons fought in the flesh. Instead, they are spiritual weapons such as truth and righteousness that can tear down strongholds and philosophies that are in opposition to God.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Second, the nature of this battle is different from an earthly battle. In Ephesians 6:12, Paul talks about the nature of this spiritual battle: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness of this world, against spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places.”

We can also have confidence because God “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13).

Many Christians do not like the warfare imagery in the Bible, but that is how the spiritual life is described. We need to prepare for this spiritual battle even if we would like to ignore the battle for truth and error as well as the battle for life and death that is taking place around us.

Third, the Bible tells us that to prepare for battle. We must wear the right armor and have the right weapons, which include truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, and prayer:

Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:14-18a).

The Bible also calls upon us to be strong in the Lord. We should be steadfast in our resistance to the Devil. We do this by putting on the whole armor of God and resisting Satan. Ephesians 6:10-11 says, “Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”

The Three Ws

One way to understand the nature of spiritual warfare is to consider the three Ws: our walk, our weapons, and our warfare.

First let's consider our walk. Paul says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh" (2 Corinthians 10:3). Our war is not an earthly one but a spiritual one. So even though we do walk in the flesh, our warfare is not fleshly.

We should understand that we didn't start this war but it has been going on long before we came on the scene. For a war to exist, there must be threat from those intend to harm others.

For the battle to be successful, those who are threatened must be willing to stand up and fight. Many wars have been lost because good people refused to fight. And many Christians believe that the reason Satan has been so successful in the world is because either (1) Christians have been unwilling to fight, or (2) Christians have not even been aware that there is a spiritual battle.

The second W is our weapons. Paul also teaches, "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (2 Corinthians 10:4). One of the most important weapons of our warfare is the Word of God. Paul calls it the "Sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17).

We are also instructed to wear armor before we go into battle (Ephesians 6). We are to gird our loins with truth (vs. 14a). That means we need to define the truth, defend the truth, and spread the truth. We are also to wear the breastplate of righteousness (vs. 14b). That means we are to rely on the righteousness of Jesus and live holy and righteous lives. We are also to take up the shield of faith (vs. 16). When we have bold faith, we are able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of Satan. And we are to take the helmet of salvation (vs. 17). We need to be assured of our salvation and stand firm in that assurance.

The third W is our warfare. What is the goal of spiritual

warfare? Paul says, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). We cannot fight this war with physical weapons because our targets are not physical. They are intellectual and spiritual. So we cannot fight them with guns or planes or bombs.

The word “speculations” (which is sometimes translated “imagination”) refers to the mind. It includes our thoughts and our reflections. So we should challenge the false ideas that Satan has encouraged in the world by countering unbiblical speculations and proclaiming God’s truth.

The World, the Flesh, and the Devil

How does spiritual warfare affect us?

When the New Testament uses the term “world,” most of the time it is a translation from the word *kosmos*. Sometimes it can mean simply the planet earth (John 1:10; Acts 17:24). But when we talk about the influence of the world on our spiritual life and on our souls, we are talking about the worldly system in which we live. This world system involves culture and philosophy that is ultimately in opposition to God. That doesn’t mean that everyone is evil or that the world’s system is filled with nothing but error. But it does mean that the world can have a negative influence on our souls.

Paul warns not to be conformed to this world (Romans 12:1). He also warns us not to let our hearts and minds be taken captive to these false ideas: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

The Bible teaches that many temptations come from the world’s system. We read in 1 John 2:15-16, “Do not love the world nor

the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

The second influence is the flesh. Like our previous term, the word flesh can have different meanings. Sometimes it merely refers to our body: our flesh and bones (Luke 24:39; Acts 2:26). In this context, however, flesh is a second area of temptation and thus an important instrument of sin. We see this in the fact that we are born with a sin nature (Romans 7:14-24; 8:5-9). It is part of our bodies (Romans 7:25; 1 John 1:8-10) even after we have accepted Jesus Christ. But the good news is that its power over us has been broken (Romans 6:1-14) so that we can have victory over sin (Romans 8:1-4).

A third influence is the Devil. The ruler and mastermind behind the world’s system is Satan. He can use the various distractions of the world’s system to draw us into sin, temptation, and worldliness. We read in 1 John 2:15 that “If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” So the Devil can use the world to turn our affections from God to the world.

Satan can also attack us through our flesh. He can entice our flesh with various temptations. We read in 1 John 2:16 that “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” He can draw our attention away from God by manipulating the desires of the flesh.

Spiritual Weapons

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual because the battle we are fighting is spiritual. Paul clearly states this in Ephesians 6:12: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the

world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” This is a spiritual battle that takes place in the heavenly places.

We should also realize that we are not warring against flesh and blood but against a spiritual enemy. So even though we might be tempted to think that people are our real enemy, our real enemy is Satan and his demons. People are merely pawns in the heavenly chess game being played out in our lives and in our world.

Paul tells us that “though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). So what are those weapons? It is interesting that Paul does not give a list to those who he is writing to in the church in Corinth. Therefore, we must assume that they were already aware of what those weapons are based on other letters Paul wrote to the various churches.

One obvious weapon is the weapon of truth. Believers are given insight into both the earthly realm and the heavenly realm because of what has been revealed in Scripture. We know what is behind the forces we wrestle with (Ephesians 6:12).

Another weapon is love. In fact, the Bible links truth with love (“speaking the truth in love” –Ephesians 4:15). Love is also a very powerful weapon in this spiritual warfare that we encounter. We should not approach people with anger or judgmentalism. But we must understand how important love is in dealing with others (1 Corinthians 13).

A third weapon is faith. Faith is defined as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Notice that faith is a conviction of things that are not seen. This is an important attribute since spiritual warfare is an invisible war. Faith is the recognition of this invisible world and the confidence that God is still in

control.

And a very important weapon is prayer. We are told in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray continually (some translations say to pray without ceasing). We are exhorted to pray about the circumstances we encounter and to use prayer as a weapon in our spiritual battle. When Paul talks about Christians putting on the armor to fight spiritual battles, he says that “with all prayer and petition” we are to “pray at all times in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18).

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The Bible: Intentionally Misunderstood

Dissecting the Bible by Focusing on Nits

Recently, New Testament scholar and expert on ancient New Testament documents, Dr. Daniel Wallace, spoke on the work being done to ensure we have the most accurate version of the Greek New Testament. He also mentioned several documents presenting a false view of this level of accuracy. One of these documents, *The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin* by Kurt Eichenwald, appeared in *Newsweek* in December 2014.^{1} His article presents arguments intended to undermine the New Testament. Let's evaluate some of these arguments to be better equipped in sharing the truth.

The article contains at least 125 errors and/or half-truths in 14 pages. Of course, I am not the first to respond to this article. Dr. Wallace and Dr. Darrel Bock both wrote responses

shortly after the document was published addressing specific areas of interest to them. I commend their posts to you as excellent resources.[{2}](#). I will address some areas that are not addressed or only partially addressed by these seminary professors.

Using Survey Data Without Understanding It

Eichenwald begins his article by parroting the negative stereotypes put forth by those who cannot be bothered with trying to understand the vast majority of evangelicals. Attempting to add some rigor to his rant, he refers to two surveys on religious beliefs. Unfortunately for Eichenwald, rather than adding rigor, his comments showed that he did not take the time to examine the survey results he was spouting.

He first states, “[Evangelicals’] lack of knowledge about the Bible is well established. A Pew Research poll in 2010[{3}](#) found that evangelicals ranked only a smidgen higher than atheists in familiarity with the New Testament and Jesus’s teachings.”[{4}](#) He referred to a table showing the average number of questions out of twelve that each faith group answered correctly. However, only two of the twelve questions had anything to do with the New Testament and none of them related to Jesus’s teachings. The remaining questions were divided equally between the Old Testament and on latter day religious figures/beliefs. [{5}](#) Two questions are not enough to evaluate someone’s knowledge of the New Testament. But, for the record, the questions were “Name the four gospels” and “Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born?” Fifty three percent of those professing to be born again answered these correctly versus twenty percent of atheists. Apparently to Eichenwald, a “smidgen higher” must mean almost three times as many. Perhaps, *Newsweek* cannot afford a fact checker?

The second poll he referenced was a 2012 effort by the Barna Group[{6}](#). He said, “[It found] that evangelicals accepted the

attitudes and beliefs of the Pharisees . . . more than they accepted the teachings of Jesus.” The study actually showed that 63% of evangelicals accepted the attitudes and actions of Jesus at least as much, if not more, than the attitudes and actions the Barna Group associated with the Pharisees.

Accuracy of English Translations Not Effectively Addressed

Eichenwald spends two pages bemoaning the translation problems in the New Testament. But as pointed out by Wallace and Bock, his critique really serves to highlight the excellence of today’s translations. The areas he points out as having questionable additions in the text are clearly marked in all of today’s popular translations and if removed make no difference in the overall message of the New Testament (i.e. the woman caught in adultery in John and snake handling at the end of Mark).

He goes on to say, “The same is true for other critical portions of the Bible, such as . . .”[\[7\]](#) and then lists three short passages which he claims did not appear in earlier Greek copies. One passage is 1 John 5:7 which was expanded in the original King James Version but (as Eichenwald is apparently unaware of) was removed in modern translations, e.g. NASU, NET, ESV, NIV. Another passage is Luke 22:20 which does appear in almost all modern translations as well as the KJV. As Metzger[\[8\]](#) points out, the longer version with Luke 22:20 appears in “all Greek manuscripts except for D and in most of the ancient versions and Fathers.” So this passage does appear in most earlier Greek copies, contrary to what Eichenwald claims. He finally refers to Luke 24:51 as a passage not found in the earlier Greek versions. Once again, he is wrong. This passage appears in many older manuscripts[\[9\]](#) including the Bodmer Papyrii written in about 200 AD.

When Eichenwald attempts to strengthen his argument, he draws from limited sources that contain questionable data. Even if they were correct, they and all the other areas where ancient

manuscripts vary do not change the message of the New Testament in any significant way. As Wallace points out, “The reality is that we are getting closer and closer to the text of the original New Testament as more and more manuscripts are being discovered and catalogued. . . . The New Testament has more manuscripts that are within a century or two of the original than anything else from the Greco-Roman world too. If we must be skeptical about what the original New Testament said, that skepticism, on average, should be multiplied one thousand times for other Greco-Roman literature.”[{10}](#)

Supposed Biblical Contradictions

After attacking the accuracy of the New Testaments available to most American Christians, Eichenwald attacks the consistency of the biblical record to undermine our confidence in what we read and the message we take from it. He presents nine different topics where he sees obvious contradictions in the text. We will examine four of them here, two from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament.

Number One: Creation

First, he claims there are three different creation models in the Bible, one in Genesis chapter 1, one in Genesis chapter 2, and “one referenced in the Books of Isaiah, Psalms and Job”[{11}](#) in which “the world is created in the aftermath of a great battle between God and . . . a dragon . . . called Rahab.”[{12}](#)

Liberal theologians claim that chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis describe different accounts. If they were describing the same events in the same way, that might be so. However, whether Exodus was written by Moses or whether it was put together later, a human author would not contradict himself on the same page. A clear-headed look at the two passages shows that chapter 1 describes the overall creation as observed from earth while chapter 2 talks about what God did on the sixth

day in creating Adam and Eve. As pointed out in the NET Bible, “for what follows (verse 2:4) is not another account of creation but a tracing of events from creation through the fall and judgment (the section extends from 2:4 through 4:26.”[{13}](#)

Eichenwald adds in the so-called third creation story of God and Rahab stating, “In fact, the Bible has three creation models”[{14}](#) as if this were a clear and well-known fact. If you read all the verses in Isaiah, Psalms and Job that reference Rahab, you will scratch your head and wonder how could anyone relate those few verses to a creation story. Rahab is a Hebrew word meaning “strong one and it is not necessarily a name. It is clear in Isaiah and Psalms that Rahab is a reference to Egypt, not some mythical dragon. In Job, it could be referring to the forces of chaos. He probably gets his idea from some articles that suggest that since Job 9:13 says “God does not restrain His anger; under Him the helpers of Rahab lie crushed” that the helpers of Rahab could refer to the helpers of Tiamat from the Babylonian Creation Epic. Even if this were true, rather than a third creation story one would say this verse tells us

1. God destroys all idols and false gods raised up by others, and
2. This is what Job said and Job was forced to retract what he said when he was confronted by Yahweh as seen in Job 42:1-6.

Eichenwald’s claim of three different creation models is an illusion.

Number Two: The Flood

Eichenwald reports another set of clear contradictions in the Genesis story of Noah and the flood. He points to three areas of supposed contradiction.

The first one has to do with how many animals are on the ark.

In Genesis 6:19, God tells Noah that he shall “bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you.” Years later after Noah has completed the ark, God tells him in Genesis 7:2 to take seven pairs of every clean animal and two of every unclean animal. Eichenwald claims this is a contradiction that the author/editor was so incompetent as to include only five verses apart. He does not consider the option that after completing the ark, God gave Noah more complete instructions because more clean animals would be needed to provide for the sacrifices to the Lord in Genesis 8:20. Noah did not need this detail before starting to build the ark.

The second contradiction is that the Bible has Noah and his family boarding the ark and the flood beginning in two different sections. What Eichenwald sees as a contradiction, most readers take as a common literary technique, i.e. summarize the situation and then describe it again with more details. This was a seminal event in human history and deserved repeating.

The third contradiction according to Eichenwald is, “The water flooded the earth for 40 days (Genesis 7:17), or 150 days (Genesis 7:24). But Noah and his family stayed on the ark for a year (Genesis 8:13).” Upon reading the account, it is clear that Noah was on the ark for 12 months and 11 days during which it rained for forty days, the earth was totally inundated for 150 days as the waters slowly receded, but Noah waited to leave the ark until the land had become dry. You may choose not to believe in a universal flood, but to say the Bible has contradictions in its description is ludicrous.

Number Three: The Trial and Crucifixion

In this claim, he states that John was written “at a time when gentiles in Rome were gaining dramatically more influence over Christianity; that explains why the Romans are largely absolved from responsibility for Jesus’s death and blame

instead is pointed toward the Jews.”[{15}](#) Thus, he implies that the other gospels put much of the blame on the Romans. Let us see if this is true.

Luke is very clear that the instigators of the death of Jesus were the Jewish leaders and those who followed them. In Luke 22:2 we read, “The chief priests and the experts in the law were trying to find some way to execute Jesus.” When Pilate is brought in to the process, Luke records that Pilate did not find Jesus guilty of anything worthy of death and stated so three different times[{16}](#). At least five times in the book of Acts, Luke records Paul as squarely placing the responsibility for Jesus’ death onto the Jewish leaders and nation.[{17}](#) We find similar verses in Matthew[{18}](#) and Mark.[{19}](#)

All of the gospels squarely place the blame on the Jewish leaders and those that followed them. Either Eichenwald has never read the gospels and just assumed the other gospels blamed the Romans, or he assumes his readers have never read the gospels.

Number Four: Ascension of Jesus

The fourth supposed contradiction deals with the ascension of Jesus. Eichenwald writes, “As told in Matthew, the disciples go to Galilee after the Crucifixion and see Jesus ascend to heaven; in Acts, written by Luke, the disciples stay in Jerusalem and see Jesus ascend from there.”[{20}](#)

As most of you know, the gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus meeting his disciples in Galilee and giving them the Great Commission. Matthew says **nothing** about Jesus ascending to heaven in Galilee or anywhere else. Because the Gospel of Luke does not discuss the time intervals, one might interpret it as saying that Jesus ascended into heaven on the day He was resurrected. But in Acts, Luke tells us that the resurrected Lord was with His disciples over a 40-day period. During which time, it would have been easy to travel to Galilee, as

recorded in Matthew and John, and then travel back to Jerusalem.

Not surprisingly, his other five so-called “contradictions” all fail to hold up when one examines the Scriptures.

Faulty Interpretation of Scripture Passages on Homosexuality

Eichenwald wants to convince us that what we think the Bible teaches about homosexuality is not what God intended.

He begins by pointing out, “The word homosexual didn’t even exist until more than 1,800 years after the New Testament was written. . . . The editors of these modern Bibles just made it up.”[{21}](#) But this could be said of many English words we use today. The ancient Greek word used in the text is a compound word clearly meaning male-with-male sexual activity. A respected dictionary of New Testament words defines it this way, “a male engaging in same-gender sexual activity, a sodomite.”[{22}](#)

He then tells us, “Most biblical scholars agree that Paul did not write 1 Timothy”[{23}](#) and, presumably, should not be trusted when addressing behaviors we should avoid, such as homosexuality. The early church fathers from the second century on and many contemporary scholars[{24}](#) do not agree it is a forgery. Regardless, the same prohibition appears in other epistles and not just in Timothy.

Eichenwald points out Romans, Corinthians and Timothy discuss other sins in more detail than homosexual behavior. He writes, “So yes, there is one verse in Romans about homosexuality . . . and there are eight verses condemning those who criticize the government.”[{25}](#)

Most people understand that explaining our relationship to the government is more complex than forbidding homosexuality which

is clearly understood. Romans talks about not resisting government authority. It says nothing about criticizing people in the government. In fact, that expression is protected by the laws of our land. In other words, to obey those laws you should feel free to criticize the government.

He then claims that people engage in other sins such as adultery, greed, drunkenness and lying and are not banished for those behaviors. But if you proclaimed you practice those actions regularly and teach them as truth, your church is going to remove you from any leadership position. They should still encourage you to attend worship services out of a desire to see God change your heart.[{26}](#) Mr. Eichenwald would be surprised to learn that most evangelical churches handle issues with homosexuality in the same way.

Then he declares, “Plenty of fundamentalist Christians who have no idea where references to homosexuality are in the New Testament . . . always fall back on Leviticus.”[{27}](#) Personally, I have never run into another church member who was unfamiliar with the New Testament, but knew “by memory” the details of Leviticus.

Christianity and the Law

Eichenwald claims homosexuality is not a sin or if it is, it is the same as all the other sins that he believes we ignore so that we can throw all our venom at homosexuals. To strengthen his position, he brings out “a fundamental conflict in the New Testament—arguably the most important one in the Bible.”[{28}](#) This conflict is whether as Christians we are to obey the Mosaic Law or whether we are to ignore it.

He claims, “The author of Matthew made it clear that Christians must keep Mosaic Law like the most religious Jews, in order to achieve salvation.”[{29}](#)

Wow, what a mistaken understanding of the message. In Matthew, Jesus explains if we want to enter the kingdom of heaven “our

righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees (the most religious Jews).”{30} We must not get angry, call people names, or lust after others in our minds. He caps it off by saying, “You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”{31} He is clearly not teaching them to be like Orthodox Jews and they will be okay. He is teaching they cannot be good enough. It is only through His sacrifice that we can be made righteous.

In Acts 15, we see that some believers who were Pharisees by background brought this question up to the apostles and elders. Peter responded by telling them, “Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our father nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they (the Gentiles) also are.”{32} And the apostles, the elders, and the whole church agreed to send directions to the Gentiles that they were not required to follow the Mosaic Law.

So as Gentiles, we are not required to follow the Law of Moses as laid out in Leviticus. But the New Testament is very careful to identify those actions and attitudes which are sin so that we Gentiles know to avoid them. Which is why sexual sins are specifically mentioned in the New Testament.{33} Even in Acts 15 where the church in Jerusalem is deciding what to tell Gentile Christians about the Law, they decide to tell them to abstain from fornication, a term generally covering all sexual activity outside of marriage.{34}

In summary, Eichenwald believes we should declare homosexuality is not a sin and those who practice it should be honored as leaders within the church. He does not suggest that we treat any other sins that way. He does not present a cogent argument that the New Testament agrees with his position. He is saying that we should ignore biblical teaching. But, we really do love those struggling with homosexual behavior and we want to help them gain freedom from those lusts just as

much as someone struggling with opposite sex issues.

Obeying the Law vs. Criticizing the Government

Eichenwald also castigates us for disobeying the New Testament teaching about government. He says Romans has “eight verses condemning those who criticize the government. . . . In other words, all fundamentalist Christians who decry Obama have sinned as much as they believe gay people have.”[{35}](#) He points to Pat Robertson as sinning when Pat stated, “We need to do something, to pray to be delivered from this president.” Does Romans condemn those who criticize the government?

Actually, Romans says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. . . . the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God.”[{36}](#) It doesn’t say that we are required to say good things about the government, but rather that we should obey the laws of our government. Our Bill

of Rights states that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.”[{37}](#) So, if we do not voice our opinions about those running our government, we are in fact, not availing ourselves of the law established by our governing authorities.

Judging Our Motives for Prayer

Eichenwald casts aspersion on people of faith for gathering together to pray. He begins by castigating a prayer rally in Houston in 2011. He says, “[Then-governor Rick] Perry stepped to a podium, his face projected on a giant screen . . . and boomed out a long prayer asking God to make America a better place . . . babbling on . . . about faith and country and the blessings of America.” He further claimed that Perry “heaped up empty phrases as the Gentiles do.”

In reality, during the daylong event, Rick Perry spoke about 12 minutes and prayed for slightly more than **two minutes**. In

his short prayer, Perry prayed in a cogent manner, praying for among others our president and his family.

Eichenwald explains that Perry is just an example of our misguided ways. The problem is that most Christians in American are disobeying the teaching of Jesus by praying in front of people and praying words other than the Lord's Prayer. As Jesus told us, "Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray . . . so that they may be seen by others."

Yes, Jesus is very clear that we are not to be hypocrites, but it is possible for someone to speak a prayer in the presence of others without being a hypocrite. Jesus does tell us to make our prayers a personal conversation with our heavenly Father. But Jesus prayed often before synagogue attenders, in front of his disciples, and before over 5,000 people. But clearly those times, although numerous, were much less than the time He spent communing with His Father alone. That ratio should be true of our lives as well.

Even stranger is Eichenwald's belief that we should only pray the Lord's Prayer just as Jesus stated it. But, the passage in Matthew 6 tells us that Jesus was giving us a model, an example, of how to pray, not giving us a set of words to repeat in a meaningless fashion. In the gospels and the other New Testaments books, we are privy to many of the prayers offered by the apostles. None of them use the words from the Lord's prayer. If only Eichenwald had been there to instruct them, they would not have sinned so grievously.

Eichenwald claims the only reason anyone could be praying in front of a large crowd, or on television, or by extension in a small congregation is "to be seen." This claim does not make sense. The people he is judging can build themselves up without having to resort to prayer.

Conclusion

In this article, we have seen that critics use an incomplete, shallow examination of Scripture to claim it is not accurate and our application is faulty. In every case, we have seen that these claims leak like a sieve.

Dan Wallace sums up Eichenwald's arguments this way:

"Time and time again the author presents his arguments as though they were facts. Any serious disagreements with his reasoning are quietly ignored as though they did not exist. The most charitable thing I can say is that Eichenwald is in need of a healthy dose of epistemic humility as well as a good research assistant who can do some fact-checking before the author embarrasses himself further in print. . . . But his numerous factual errors and misleading statements, his lack of concern for any semblance of objectivity, his apparent disdain for and lack of interaction with genuine evangelical scholarship, and his uber-confidence about more than a few suspect viewpoints, make me wonder. . . . Eichenwald's grasp of conservative Christianity in America as well as his grasp of genuine biblical scholarship are, at best, subpar. And this article is an embarrassment to Newsweek—or should be!" [\[38\]](#)

If Eichenwald's article represents the best scholarship discrediting the Bible, one rejoices in our firm foundation. On the other hand, realizing how many readers of such pieces don't know their flimsy nature, one is saddened by the potential impact on a society inclined to ignore the Bible.

Notes

1. Eichenwald, Kurt, "The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin," *Newsweek Magazine*, December 2014.
2. Daniel B. Wallace, "[Predictable Christmas Fare: Newsweek's Tirade against the Bible](#)," blogpost December 2014 and Bock, Darrell, "[Darrell Bock Responds to Kurt Eichenwald's Newsweek](#)

[Article on the Bible](#)," blogpost December 2014.

3. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey, September 2010, pages 17-23.

4. Eichenwald, paragraph 4.

5. The 12 questions are as follows:

1. What is the first book of the Bible? (Open-ended)
2. What are the names of the first four books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels?
3. Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born? Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth or Jericho?
4. Which of these is NOT in the Ten Commandments? Do unto others . . . , no adultery, no stealing, keep Sabbath?
5. Which figure is associated with remaining obedient to God despite suffering? Job, Elijah, Moses or Abraham?
6. Which figure is associated with leading the exodus from Egypt? Moses, Job, Elijah or Abraham?
7. Which figure is associated with willingness to sacrifice his son for God? Abraham, Job, Moses or Elijah?
8. What is Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? They become body and blood, or are symbols?
9. Which group traditionally teaches that salvation is through faith alone? Protestants, Catholics, both or neither?
10. Was Mother Teresa Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Mormon?
11. What is the name of the person whose writings and actions inspired the Reformation? Luther, Aquinas or Wesley?
12. Who was a preacher during the First Great Awakening? Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney or Billy Graham?

6. The Barna Group, *Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees?*, 2012.

7. Eichenwald, paragraph 19.

8. Metzger, Bruce, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition, German Bible Society, Stuttgart,

pages 148-150.

9. Ibid, pages 162-163.

10. Wallace.

11. Eichenwald, paragraph 66.

12. Ibid, paragraph 66.

13. New English Translation, Genesis Chapter 2 Notes 9 and 11.

14. Eichenwald, paragraph 66.

15. Eichenwald, paragraph 51.

16. See Luke 23:4,14,22.

17. See Acts 2:23,23,3:14-15,4:10,5:30.

18. Matthew 26:4,27:23-24.

19. Mark 14:1, 15:14-15.

20. Eichenwald, paragraph 52.

21. Ibid, paragraph 68.

22. William Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Zondervan, 2006.

23. Eichenwald, paragraph 70.

24. Among those disagreeing with Eichenwald's assertion are Daniel Wallace, John MacArthur, Charles Swindoll, John Stott, and Craig Keener.

25. Eichenwald, paragraph 77.

26. See the Watermark Community Church story:

www.watermark.org/statement

27. Eichenwald, paragraph 80.

28. Eichenwald, paragraph 81.

29. Eichenwald, paragraph 82.

30. Matthew 5:20.

31. Matthew 5:48.

32. Acts 15:10-11.

33. For example in Mt 5:27-28, Romans 13:13-14, 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, Ephesians 4:19, Col 3:5, 1 Peter 4:3.

34. Acts 15:20,29.

35. Eichenwald, paragraph 77.

36. Romans 13:1,2.

37. Amendment 1 to the Constitution of the United States of America.

38. Wallace.

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