

Examining the Book of Mormon – A Christian View

The book of Mormon needs to be evaluated by the light of scripture and its purported evidence for its reliability. Dr. Pat Zukeran shows that the bad character of the book's witnesses, the lack of archaeological support, and internal errors reveal it to be the flawed work of man, not God.

The Mormon Story

Some people believe the *Book of Mormon* is a new revelation from God given to Joseph Smith. Mormons recognize it as divinely inspired and equal in authority to the Bible, but others have reason to doubt its claims.

Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt wrote in 1851, “The *Book of Mormon* claims to be a divinely inspired record. . . . This book must be either true or false. . . . If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep-laid impositions ever planned upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions who will sincerely receive it as the word of God. . . . If true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it.”[\[1\]](#)

In this article, we will take a look at internal and external evidences for the *Book of Mormon* to see if it should be considered inspired writing.

The *Book of Mormon* is said to be a record of two ancient Jewish civilizations that migrated to America. The Jaredites left Babylonia during the building of the Tower of Babel in approximately 2,250 B.C. After establishing a civilization in America that lasted two thousand years. They eventually succumbed to corruption and apostasy and were judged by God and destroyed.

The second group of Jews left Jerusalem in 600 B.C. before the Babylonian exile during the reign of King Zedekiah. This group crossed the Pacific and landed on the west coast of South America. Lehi and his son Nephi led these righteous Jews. This group eventually divided into two warring camps, the Nephites and the Lamenites and spread throughout North and South America. The Lamenites were cursed with dark skin because of their evil deeds and were the forefathers of the American Indians.[{2}](#)

Latter-day Saints believe that during the end of the 4th century A.D. the Nephite prophet general Mormon and his son Moroni, compiled the records of these two civilizations using the Reformed Egyptian language and recorded them on gold plates. Moroni hid the plates in the hills of Cumorah near Palmyra, New York to be revealed at a later time. The Lamenites eventually destroyed the Nephites in 421 A.D. on the Hill Cumorah. The Lamenite civilizations continued to degenerate and had forgotten their Jewish history. When Columbus found them centuries later, they had become as the *Book of Mormon* describes them, a “filthy and a loathsome people.” (*Book of Mormon* 5:15)

Does the *Book of Mormon* qualify as divinely inspired scripture? In determining the answer, we will take a critical look at several key issues. First we will look at the nature in which Joseph Smith received his revelations. Second, we will investigate the character of the author and the key witnesses. Third, since the *Book of Mormon* claims to be a historical work, we will see if there is evidence to support this claim. Finally, since the *Book of Mormon* says it is the most perfect book ever written, we will examine it to see if it contains any false precepts. Let's examine the Book to see if it is an inspired ancient historical record or a nineteenth century product.

Origin of the *Book of Mormon*

Mormons believe Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823 as a glorified resurrected being, and delivered to him the golden plates from their hiding place in the Cumorah hills. Using an occult seer stone, Smith translated the history of the Lamenites and Nephites into the *Book of Mormon*.[\[3\]](#)

In studying the origin of the *Book of Mormon*, we must first investigate the issue of the canon of scripture. Christians believe the canon is closed with the 66 books of the Bible. There are no more revelations outside these books. Here are some reasons why.

First the authority to write the Holy Scripture was given to the Old Testament prophets of God and the New Testament Apostles of Christ. The last apostle died at the end of the first century A.D. and there has not been anyone who fulfills the qualifications for apostleship since then.

Second, the canon is confirmed to be closed by Judaism, Jesus, the Apostles, and the early church. According to the writings of eye witnesses—Emma Smith (one of Joseph Smith's wives), William Smith (his brother), and David Whitmer (one of the three key witnesses), Smith used a common occult practice of crystal gazing.

In 1877 David Whitmer wrote,

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the *Book of Mormon* was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was

his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the *Book of Mormon* was translated by the gift and power of God and not by any power of man.”{4}

Emma Smith wrote to her children, “In writing for your father, I frequently wrote day after day. . . . He sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us.”{5} So according to these accounts, Joseph Smith received his revelations word for word and used a seer stone.

By contrast, the Bible was not given to us in a word for word dictation form, nor is there a case of any biblical writer using an occult object to receive revelations from God. Mormons point to the use of the Urim and Thummim but their purpose was quite different. The Urim and Thummim were used for a time by the Aaronic priests only to gain answers of Yes or No from God to particular questions. Lots were cast to discern God’s will, not to receive content for revelation. Finally, we must understand, the Aaronic priesthood and its practices are replaced by the finished work of Christ (Hebrews 7:12). Occult methods, such as crystal gazing, are forbidden in the Bible (Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Leviticus 19:26, 31). Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie even denounces using objects to gain new revelation. He condemns Hiram Page, one of the witnesses of the *Book of Mormon* for using a seer stone to gain new revelations. Joseph Smith obtained his revelations contrary to the method of inspiration received by the biblical Prophets and Apostles.

Character of the 11 Witnesses

Joseph Smith claims that after he translated the plates, he returned them to the angel Moroni. Therefore, there is no way to verify the veracity of the plates or Smith’s translation.

Smith's only defense of his account is the eleven men who signed statements claiming to have seen the golden plates. Therefore, the credibility of Smith's account rests on the testimony of these eleven witnesses. There are three key witnesses who claim to have seen the angel show the golden plates to them. The remaining eight allege to have seen the plates but not the angel. The LDS church asserts these men never denied their testimony. However, when we examine the lives of the witnesses, we find they were untrustworthy, wavering, and gullible witnesses.

Six of the eleven witnesses, including the three key witnesses were eventually excommunicated from the church. Former Mormon President Ezra Taft Benson summed up the legacy of the eleven witnesses this way. "Six of the original Twelve Apostles selected by Joseph Smith were excommunicated. The three Witnesses to the *Book of Mormon* left the church. Three of Joseph Smith's counselors fell—one even helped plot his death. . . . The wolves among our flock are more numerous and devious today than when President Clark made a similar statement [in 1949]."[\[6\]](#)

Let us first examine the character of the three key witnesses since their testimony is the most important. In a letter dated December 16, 1838, Joseph Smith stated this about the three key witnesses and John Whitmer, one of the eight. "John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris are too mean to mention."[\[7\]](#)

Martin Harris' testimony shows him to be a gullible and unstable man. He changed his religious conviction approximately thirteen times. He had joined several Christian denominations and other cult groups that include the Universalists, Strangites, and the Shakers. [\[8\]](#) (Ankerberg, 196) In *Doctrine and Covenants*, Joseph Smith gave revelations in which he denounces Martin Harris and calls him a "wicked man."[\[9\]](#) The Mormon leaders published an article in the *Elder's Journal*, a Mormon publication edited by Joseph Smith,

in which they accused Harris guilty of “swearing, lying, cheating, swindling, drinking, with every species of debauchery. . .” (*Elders Journal*, August, 1838, 59).[{10}](#) Here the leaders of the Mormon Church strongly criticize the character of Harris.

Oliver Cowdery was also shown to be a very gullible man. He was led astray by Hiram Page, one of the eight witnesses who himself claimed to have divine revelations from his own seer stone. Although Joseph Smith denounced Hiram as a false teacher, Smith stated “to our grief, however, we soon found that Satan had been lying in wait to deceive. . . . Brother Hiram Page had in his possession a certain stone, by which he obtained certain ‘revelations’ . . . all of which were entirely at variance with the order of God’s House, . . .”[{11}](#) Despite Smith’s condemnation, Oliver Cowdery joined Page’s movement. Not only was he a gullible man, he was also indicted on several accounts of fraudulent business practices. The Mormon Church in a letter wrote, “During the career of Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer’s bogus money business, it got abroad into the world that they were engaged in it. . . . We have evidence of a very strong character that you are at this very time engaged with a gang of counterfeiters, coiners, and blacklegs . . .”[{12}](#) Cowdery was eventually excommunicated and he later joined the Methodist Church.

David Whitmer wrote, “God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens, and told me to ‘separate myself from among the Latter- day Saints, for as they sought to do unto me, so should it be done unto them.” In the spring of 1838, the heads of the church and many of the members had gone deep into error and blindness. . . . About the same time that I came out, the Spirit of God moved upon quite a number of the brethren who came out, with their families, all of the eight witnesses who were then living (except the three Smiths) came out; . . .”[{13}](#) Here David Whitmer denounced the Mormon Church and encouraged people to follow his example and the example of the

other witnesses and leave the church.

Joseph Smith in response attacked the character of David Whitmer. Smith stated, "God suffered such kind of beings to afflict Job . . . this poor man who professes to be much of a prophet, has no other dumb ass to ride but David Whitmer, to forbid his madness when he goes up to curse Israel: and this ass not being of the same kind as Balaam's . . . he brays out cursing instead of blessings. Poor ass!"[\[14\]](#)

The character and life of the eleven witnesses to the *Book of Mormon* are very different from the Apostles of Christ. None of the Apostles wavered in their defense of Christ, even though all suffered and most died for their faith. The Apostles remained consistent in their teaching and never fell into any type of apostasy. Their lives were marked by honesty and integrity. They were never indicted for any criminal activity except for preaching Christ. The character of the *Book of Mormon's* eleven witnesses does not strengthen Smith's defense but cast further doubt on its authenticity.

Archaeology and the *Book of Mormon*

According to the *Book of Mormon*, Jews migrated from the Middle East to Central and South America and established great civilizations on the continents of North and South America. The *Book of Mormon* states that large cities were built so that by 322 A.D. "The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings and the people were as numerous almost as it were the sand of the sea." (Mormon 1:7) Thirty-eight cities are specifically mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*. Also in the final battle between the Nephites and Lamenites, 230,000 Nephites were killed near the hills of Cumorah in New York.

With such a vast population and cities, one would expect to find numerous archaeological evidences to substantiate such large civilizations. However, there is no evidence to validate the claims of the *Book of Mormon*. Despite expeditions financed

by the Mormon Church, archaeologists have concluded the *Book of Mormon* is not historical but a work of fiction.

The Smithsonian Institute in a letter to the Mormon Church states, "The Smithsonian Institution has never used the *Book of Mormon* in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian Archaeologists see no connection between the archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the Book." [\[15\]](#)

The National Geographic Society writes, "With regard to the cities mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*, neither representatives of the National Geographic Society nor archaeologists connected with any other institution of equal prestige have ever used the *Book of Mormon* in locating historic ruins in Middle America or elsewhere." [\[16\]](#)

Even Mormon archaeologists admit there is no conclusive evidence. Dr. Hugh Nibley, a Mormon apologist, states in his book *Since Cumorah* that no real archaeological proof for the Nephite civilization exists. He writes regarding the Nephites, "All that we have to go on to date is a written history . . . there is nothing whatever that an anthropologist or archaeologist as such can say about the *Book of Mormon*." [\[17\]](#)

Dee Green, professor of anthropology at Weber State University and a respected Mormon scholar states, "The first myth we must eliminate is that *Book of Mormon* archaeology exists . . . no *Book of Mormon* location is known with reference to modern topography. Biblical archaeology can be studied because we do know where Jerusalem and Jericho were and are, but we do not know where Zarahemla and Bountiful (nor any other location for that matter) were or are. It would seem that a concentration on geography should be the first order of business, but . . . years of such an approach has left us empty-handed." [\[18\]](#)

Another prominent Mormon scholar is B.H. Roberts. He was described as one of the most valiant writers and speakers in defense of the *Book of Mormon*. However, after years of

research he concluded at the end of his life that the *Book of Mormon* was a fictional work created by Joseph Smith. He wrote, "the evidence I sorrowfully submit, points to Joseph Smith as their creator. It is difficult to believe that they are the product of history, that they come upon the scene separated by long periods of time, and among a race which was the ancestral race of the red man of America."[\[19\]](#)

Another prominent defender of the *Book of Mormon* was Thomas Ferguson, who was president of the New World Archaeological Foundation, which was funded by Brigham Young University and the Mormon Church. He hoped to discover archaeological support for the *Book of Mormon*. In 1962 he announced, "Powerful evidences sustaining the book are accumulating."[\[20\]](#) However, after years of research and many fruitless expeditions, his original hopes were shattered.[\[21\]](#) He eventually wrote,

With all these great efforts, it cannot be established factually that anyone, from Joseph smith to the present day, has put his finger on a single point of terrain that was a *Book of Mormon* geographical place. And the hemisphere has been pretty well checked out by competent people I must agree with Dee Green, who has told us that to date there is no *Book of Mormon* geography. I, for one, would be happy if Dee were wrong.[\[22\]](#)

In contrast, biblical archaeology has provided thousands of discoveries that have confirmed biblical references. Hundreds of ancient civilizations, artifacts, historical records and inscriptions have been discovered that prove the historical accuracy of the Bible. Archaeological discoveries confirming biblical accounts have been acknowledged by Christians as well as skeptics. Foremost Middle East archaeologist Dr. William Albright wrote, "Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history."[\[23\]](#) When asked if archaeology confirms the accuracy of the New Testament, scholar John McCray states, "Oh, there

is no question that the credibility of the New Testament is enhanced.”{24} A historical faith should have historical proofs. Historical research has led both Christians and skeptics to affirm the historicity of the Bible. However, historical research has proven damaging for the *Book of Mormon*.

Errors in the *Book of Mormon*

Mormons claim the *Book of Mormon* is the most perfect book ever written. Joseph Smith stated, “I told the brethren that the *Book of Mormon* was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than any other book.”{25}

Is Joseph Smith’s claim true? Errors in the *Book of Mormon* should cause one to question its divine inspiration.

In studying the *Book of Mormon*, one soon finds numerous historical, geographical, and scientific errors. First, in Mormon 9:32 the *Book of Mormon* claims to have been written in Reformed Egyptian, but Egyptologists say this language does not exist. Second, in Alma 7:10, Jerusalem is called a land or country when it is a city. In Alma 46:15 the saved in America take on the name Christian in 73 B.C. In the Bible, believers are not called Christian until 50 A.D. in Acts 11:3. Nephi 17:7 teaches that leprosy occurred in America in 34 A.D. but no cases of leprosy here are known until 1758. Mormon 9:2 and other references teach that the Indians had official records, scrolls, and other writings, but historical research shows no such records were kept. (Mormon 5:23, 3 Nephi 9:18, 12:18)

Not only are there historical errors, but there are false teachings as well. Alma 24:16 teaches that burying swords deep in the earth will keep them bright. Basic science proves that burying steel objects causes decay and rust. 2 Nephi 13:24 teaches that baldness is caused by sin. Other absurdities include the teaching that God curses Indians with dark skin

and anyone who marries an Indian will be cursed (2 Nephi 5:21 Jacob 3:3-9, Mormon 5:15-17, Alma 3:6-10). However, when Indians accept the Mormon teaching, they will become white and delightsome. (2 Nephi 30:5-7)

There appear to be internal contradictions also. In 3 Nephi 9:18, Jesus allegedly preached to the Nephites who fled Jerusalem in 600 B.C. with concepts communicated in the Greek language. But the Nephites are said to have written and spoken in Reformed Egyptian. Therefore, they would have no knowledge of Greek since Alexander, who lived in the 4th century, had not Hellenized the world yet. Jesus preaching to the non-Greek Nephites declaring, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," would have not made any sense. Moreover, Joseph Smith and the Mormons claim the gold plates from which the *Book of Mormon* was translated had no Greek or Latin in them.[\[26\]](#) However, Alpha and Omega are Greek, not Egyptian terms. Even stranger is that the French word "adieu" is used as a farewell in Jacob 7:27.

In contrast to the *Book of Mormon*, the Bible proves to be historically accurate and internally consistent. It also does not have the absurd teachings that we find in the *Book of Mormon*. The evidence appears to point to the fact that the *Book of Mormon* is not an ancient historical text, but an 18th century work created by Joseph Smith.

Notes

1. Orson Pratt, "Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon," *Orson Pratt's Works*, (Liverpool: 1851), 1, quoted in Richard and Joan Ostling, *Mormon America*, (San Francisco: Harper and Collins Publishing, 1999), 263.
2. Joseph Smith, *Book of Mormon*. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), Introduction page.
3. Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*. (Salt Lake: Bookcraft, 1991), 98.
4. David Whitmer, "An Address to All Believers in Christ by a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon" (1887 reprint, Concord, CA: Pacific Publishing Company, 1972),

- 12, quoted in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *What do Mormons Really Believe?* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 167-168.
5. *The Saints Herald*, May 19, 1888, 310, quoted in Ankerberg and Weldon, *What do Mormons Really Believe?*, 167-168.
6. Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, (Salt Lake City, UT.: Bookcraft, 1988), 89.
7. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Volume 3, 232.
8. John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Mormonism*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1992), 196.
9. Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants* 3:12-13 & 10:7.
10. Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 96.
11. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Volume 1, 109-110, quoted in Tanner, 96.
12. Letter quoted in Senate Document 189, February 15, 1841, 6-9, quoted in Tanner, 98.
13. David Whitmer, "An Address to All Believers in Christ," 1887, 27-28, quoted in Tanner, 97.
14. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Volume 3, 228, quoted in Tanner, 97.
15. Official Letter from the Smithsonian Institution, Summer, 1979.
16. Ankerberg & Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Mormonism*, 184.
17. Tanner, 138-139.
18. Ibid., 139-140.
19. B.H. Roberts, *Studies in the Book of Mormon*, (Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 243, quoted in Richard Abanas, *One Nation Under Gods*, (New York, NY: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002), 76.
20. Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *One Fold and One Shepherd* (1962), 263, quoted in Tanner, 140.
21. Tanner, 140-141.
22. Thomas Stuart Ferguson, "Written symposium on the Book of

Mormon Geography:

Response of Thomas Ferguson to the Norman and Sorenson Papers," 4, 7, 29, quoted in Abanas, 77.

23. William Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, Pelican Books, 1960, 127, quoted in Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, (San Bernadino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), 65.

24. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 96.

25. *Book of Mormon*, Introduction page.

26. Times and Seasons, 4:194; J.N. Washburn, Contents, Structure and Authorship of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City UT; Bookcraft, 1954), 161, cited in Tanner, 124.

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Is Comparison Always Bad?

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

“Comparison is the thief of joy.”

I've been hearing that for decades.

But is it, always?

Examples of how true that is, most certainly abound.

I recently read my friend Amy's Facebook account of her college experience. A gifted singer, she was a jazz vocalist major at a university known for its excellent music program. The only problem was that she had a friend and classmate who was so much better than Amy. She used to go home on weekends and bemoan the difference to her parents, asking why *they* couldn't be jazz musicians like her friend's parents. She eventually changed her major to pre-med, which was easier in comparison.

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

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

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

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

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

It's not just personal assets though. On Facebook and Cruise Critic, I read people dissing Carnival Cruise line as "the Wal-Mart of cruising." This affordable vacation provides customers with 24/7 electricity and clean water, unlimited

food and drink, a clean room and a comfortable bed with their own bathroom, daily room cleaning, more entertainment and recreation options than they can possibly take advantage of—all available in the middle of the ocean. Millions if not billions of people on earth can only dream of this level of luxury.

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

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

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

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

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

This is heartbreaking.

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

So . . . is comparison *always* bad?

No!

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

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

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

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

I think the ultimate value in the redemptive kind of comparison, though, is found in comparing ourselves not to

other people, but to Jesus.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us to “fix our eyes on Jesus.” If we compare ourselves to Him, we will see ourselves as appropriately small, weak, lesser than, and desperately needy of Him. If we fix our eyes on Him, we won’t be distracted by comparing ourselves to others and end up feeling either puffed up or put down. If we compare ourselves to Him, we will experience true humility, which is seeing ourselves as neither too big nor too small, but right-sized.

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

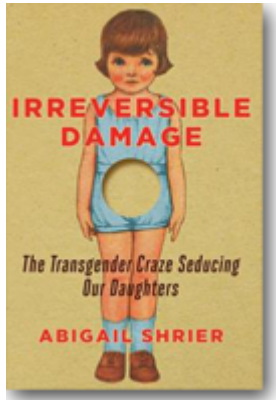
This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/is-comparison-always-bad/ on May 16, 2023.

Transgenderism

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of the transgender craze that has taken over the western world in the past ten years, drawing on startling insights from Abigail Shrier and Ryan Anderson.

Transgenderism is the belief that people have a “gender identity” that is distinct from their sex. If they feel there is a conflict between their gender and their sex, gender identity should take precedence. Although a very small fraction of the population may experience gender dysphoria, the current percentage of Americans identifying as transgender or nonbinary has exploded.

Gender Dysphoria Research



Abigail Shrier wrote about the transgender craze in her book *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*. When she joined me on my Point of View radio program, she explained that “gender dysphoria” was characterized by severe and persistent discomfort in one’s biological sex. It typically begins in early childhood. In previous generations, it afflicted a sliver of the population (roughly .01 percent) and occurred mostly in boys.

Prior to 2012, there was no scientific literature on girls (11-21) ever having developed gender dysphoria at all. Then the Western world experienced a sudden surge of adolescents claiming to have gender dysphoria and self-identifying as “transgender.”

In 2016, Lisa Littman (an ob-gyn, public health researcher) was scrolling through social media when she noticed a statistical peculiarity. Several adolescents (most of them girls) from a small town in Rhode Island had come out as transgender. In fact, they were all from the same friend group.

She admitted that she knew very little about gender dysphoria, but this statistical anomaly was interesting to her. And she then noticed there had been a sudden spike in the western world of girls experiencing gender dysphoria. She immersed herself in the scientific literature on gender dysphoria to try to understand what was happening. Perhaps it was due to increased social acceptance of LGBTQ people, but she suggested in a peer-reviewed paper that the girls might be rushing toward “transition” because of peer contagion. As you might imagine, her suggestion was roundly criticized. She was also accused of anti-trans bigotry.

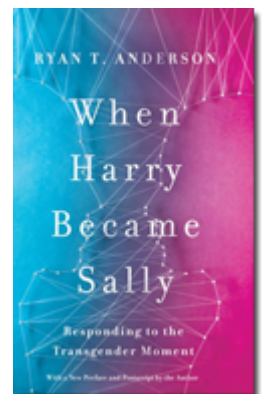
In a subsequent research project, she collected data anonymously from 256 parents whose kids had not met the

criteria of gender dysphoria in childhood, but suddenly identified as transgender in adolescence. She identified 16 traits in common. Here are a few.

- The vast majority have zero indicators of childhood gender dysphoria.
- Almost a third of them did not seem at all gender dysphoric.
- A majority had one or more psychiatric diagnosis and almost half were engaged in self-harm prior to the onset of dysphoria.
- Nearly 70 percent of the teenagers belonged to a peer group in which at least one friend had also come out as transgender.
- Among parents who knew their children's social status, over 60 percent said the announcement brought a popularity boost.
- Over 88 percent of the parents surveyed reported being supportive of transgender rights.

How to Respond to the Transgender Moment

Ryan Anderson is the author of the book, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*. He explains how transgender ideology promotes the opportunity for children to change their gender with surgery and drugs. And parents “are told that puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones may be the only way to prevent their children from committing suicide.”



Ryan Anderson countered that the best studies of gender dysphoria have found “that between 80 and 95 percent of children who express a discordant gender identity will come to identify with their bodily sex if natural development is

allowed to proceed.” He also documented that even children going through “transitioning” treatment still have an extraordinarily high rate of suicide attempts compared to the general population.

He reminded us that we should be tolerant and loving toward children (and adults) who struggle with their gender identity. But we should also be aware of the potential harm when transgender identity is normalized.

Unfortunately, we are living in a world where transgender activists want more than tolerance and kindness. They demand affirmation. We aren’t allowed to question whether using medical treatments to aid in transgender transformation is positive for children. In his book, Ryan Anderson shows that the best biology, psychology, and philosophy support an understanding of sex as a bodily reality. As he puts it: “Biology isn’t bigotry.”

Abigail Shrier also offers several suggestions. **First, don’t get your kid a smartphone.** She explains that nearly every problem teenagers face traces itself back to the introduction of the smartphone years ago.

Second, don’t relinquish your authority as a parent. You don’t have to go along with every idea your teenager has, nor do you have to go along with every educational or psychological fad being promoted in society.

Third, don’t support gender ideology in your child’s education. She provides an example of what happens when schools do a seminar on anorexia or suicide. Often the prevalence increases. A small number of students may have gender confusion or gender dysphoria. But talking about it will spread confusion.

Finally, don’t be afraid to admit that it’s wonderful to be a girl.

While she talks about the benefits and opportunities of being a girl, Christians can go even further. We believe God is responsible for who we are and what we are. Each one of us is created in God's image (Genesis 1:26). We can celebrate girls and boys and encourage them to use their gender and their gifts to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 1:31).

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The Causes of War

Meic Pearse's book The Gods of War gives great insight into the charge that religion is the cause of most war. History shows this is not true: the cause of most war is the sinful human heart, even when religion is invoked as a reason.

The Accusation

Sam Harris, the popular author and atheist, says that "for everyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict."[\[1\]](#) Writing for the Freedom from Religion Foundation, fellow atheist Richard Dawkins adds, "Only the willfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today."[\[2\]](#) Speaking more bluntly, one British government official has said, "theocrats, religious leaders or fanatics citing holy texts . . . constitutes the greatest threat to world peace today."[\[3\]](#)

War is the ultimate act of intolerance, and since intolerance is seen as the only unforgivable sin in our postmodern times, it's not surprising that



those hostile to religion would charge people holding religious convictions with the guilt for causing war.

This view is held by many others, not just despisers of religion. A 2006 opinion poll taken in Great Britain found that 82% of adults “see religion as a cause of division and tension between people. Only 16% disagree.”[\[4\]](#)

To be honest, religion has been, and remains, a source of conflict in the world; but to what degree? Is it the only source of war, as its critics argue? Is it even the primary source? And if we agree that religion is a source of war, how do we define what qualifies as a religion? This leads to another question. Are all religions equally responsible for war or are some more prone to instigate conflict than others? Once these issues are decided, we are still left with one of the most difficult questions: How does a religious person, especially a Christian, respond to the question of war?

When confronted with the accusation that religion, and more importantly, Christianity, has been the central cause of war down through history, most Christians respond by ceding the point. We will argue that the issue is far too complex to merely blame war on religious strife. A more nuanced response is needed. Religion is sometimes the direct cause of war, but other times it plays a more ambiguous role. It can also be argued, as Karl Marx did, that religion can actually restrain the warring instinct.

In his provocative new book, *The Gods of War*, Meic Pearse argues that modern atheists greatly overstate their case regarding religion as a cause for war, and that all religions are not equal when it comes to the tendency to resort to violence. He believes that the greatest source for conflict in the world today is the universalizing tendencies of modern secular nations that are pressing their materialism and moral relativism on more traditional cultures.

The Connection Between Religion and War

When someone suggests a simple answer to something as complex as war, it probably is *too* simple. History is usually more complicated than we would like it to be.

How then should Christians respond when someone claims religion is the cause of all wars? First, we must admit that religion can be and sometimes is the cause of war. Although it can be difficult to separate political, cultural, and religious motivations, there have been instances when men went off to war specifically because they believed that God wanted them to. That being said, in the last one hundred years the modern era with its secular ideologies has generated death and destruction on a scale never seen before in history. Not during the Crusades, the Inquisition, nor even during the Thirty Years War in Europe.

The total warfare of the twentieth century combined powerful advances in war-making technologies with highly structured societies to devastating effect. WWI cost close to eight and a half million lives. The more geographically limited Russian Civil War that followed the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 resulted in nine million deaths. WWII cost sixty million deaths, as well as the destruction of whole cities by fire bombing and nuclear devices.

Both Nazi fascism and communism rejected the Christian belief that humanity holds a unique role in creation and replaced it with the necessity of conflict and strife. By the end of the nineteenth century, Darwin's ideas regarding natural selection and survival of the fittest had begun to affect philosophy, the social sciences, and even theology. Darwin had left us with a brutal universe devoid of meaning. The communist and fascist worldviews were both firmly grounded in Darwin's universe.

Hitler's obsession with violence is well known, but the

communists were just as vocal about their attachment to it. Russian revolution leader Leon Trotsky wrote, "We must put an end once and for all to the papist-Quaker babble about the sanctity of human life." Lenin argued that the socialist state was to be "a system of organized violence against the bourgeoisie" or middle class. While critics of the Russian Tsar and his ties with the Orthodox Russian Church could point to examples of oppression and cruelty, one historian has noted that when the communists had come to power "more prisoners were shot at just one soviet camp in a single year than had been executed by the tsars during the entire nineteenth century." [\[5\]](#)

So, religion is not the primary cause of warfare and cruelty, at least not during the last one hundred years. But what about wars fought in the more distant past; surely most of them were religiously motivated. Not really.

Meic Pearce argues that "most wars, even before the rise of twentieth century's secularist creeds, owed little or nothing to religious causation." [\[6\]](#) Considering the great empires of antiquity, Pearce writes that "neither the Persians nor the Greeks nor the Romans fought either to protect or to advance the worship of their gods." [\[7\]](#) Far more ordinary motives were involved like the desire for booty, the extension of the empire, glory in battle, and the desire to create buffer zones with their enemies. Each of these empires had their gods which would be called upon for aid in battle, but the primary cause of these military endeavors was not the advancement of religious beliefs.

Invasions by the Goths, Huns, Franks, and others against the Roman Empire, attacks by the Vikings in the North and the Mongols in Asia were motivated by material gain as well and not religious belief. The fourteenth century conquests of Timur Leng (or Tamerlane) in the Middle East and India resulted in the deaths of millions. He was a Muslim, but he

conquered Muslim and pagan alike. At one point he had seventy thousand Muslims beheaded in Baghdad so that towers could be built with their skulls.[\[8\]](#)

More recently, the Hundred Years War between the French and English, the American Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars were secular conflicts. Religious beliefs might have been used to wrap the conflicts with a Christian veneer, but promoting the cause of Christ was not at the heart of the conflicts.

Pearce argues that down through the millennia, humanity has gone to war for two main reasons: greed expressed by the competition for limited resources, and the need for security from other predatory cultures. The use of religion as a legitimating device for conflict has become a recent trend as it became less likely that a single individual could take a country to war without the broad support of the population.

It can be argued that religion was, without ambiguity, at the center of armed conflict during two periods in history. The first was during the birth and expansion of Islam which resulted in an ongoing struggle with Christianity, including the Crusades during the Middle Ages. The second was the result of the Reformation in Europe and was fought between Protestant and Catholic states. Even here, political motivations were part of the blend of causes that resulted in armed conflict.

Islam and Christianity

Do all religions have the same propensity to cause war? The two world religions with the largest followings are Christianity and Islam. While it is true that people have used both belief systems to justify armed conflict, are they equally likely to cause war? Do their founder's teachings, their holy books, and examples from the earliest believers encourage their followers to do violence against others?

Although Christianity has been used to justify forced

conversions and violence against unbelievers, the connection between what Christianity actually teaches and these acts of violence has been ambiguous at best and often contradictory. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians told to use violence to further the Kingdom of God. Our model is Christ who is the perfect picture of humility and servant leadership, the one who came to lay down his life for others. Meic Pearce writes, "For the first three centuries of its history, Christianity was spread exclusively by persuasion and was persecuted for its pains, initially by the Jews but later, from 63, by the Romans." [{9}](#) It wasn't until Christianity became the de facto state religion of the Roman Empire around AD 400 that others were persecuted in the name of Christ.

The history of Islam is quite different. Warfare and conflict are found at its very beginning and is embodied in Muhammad's actions and words. Islam was initially spread through military conquest and maintained by threat of violence. As one pair of scholars puts it, there can be no doubt that "Islam was cradled in violence, and that Muhammad himself, through the twenty-six or twenty-seven raids in which he personally participated, came to serve for some Muslims as a role model for violence." [{10}](#)

Much evidence can be corralled to make this point. Muhammad himself spoke of the necessity of warfare on behalf of Allah. He said to his followers, "I was ordered to fight all men until they say, 'There is no God but Allah.'" [{11}](#) Prior to conquering Mecca, he supported his small band of believers by raiding caravans and sharing the booty. Soon after Muhammad's death, a war broke out over the future of the religion. Three civil wars were fought between Muslims during the first fifty years of the religion's history, and three of the four leaders of Islam after Muhammad were assassinated by other Muslims. The Quran and Hadith, the two most important writings in Islam, make explicit the expectation that all Muslim men will fight to defend the faith. Perhaps the most telling aspect of

Islamic belief is that there is no separation between religious and political authority in the Islamic world. A threat to one is considered a threat to the other and almost guarantees religiously motivated warfare.

Pacifism or Just Wars?

Although most Christians advocate either pacifism or a “just war” view when it comes to warfare and violence, Pearse argues that there are difficulties with both. Pacifism works at a personal level, but “there cannot be a pacifist state, merely a state that depends on others possessed of more force or of the willingness to use it.”[\[12\]](#) Some pacifists argue that humans are basically good and that violence stems from misunderstandings or social injustice. This is hardly a traditional Christian teaching. Pearse argues that “a repudiation of force in all circumstances . . . is an abandonment of victims—real people—to their fate.”[\[13\]](#)

Just war theory as advocated by Augustine in the early fifth century teaches that war is moral if it is fought for a just cause and carried out in a just fashion. A just cause bars wars of aggression or revenge, and is fought only as a last resort. It also must have a reasonable chance of success and be fought under the direction of a ruler in an attitude of love for the enemy. It seeks to reestablish peace, not total destruction of the vanquished, and to insure that noncombatants are not targeted.

However, even WWII, what many believe to be our most justified use of force, failed to measure up to this standard. Massive air raids against civilian populations by the Allies were just one of many violations that disallow its qualification as a just war. As Pearse argues, “war has an appalling dynamic of its own: it drags down the participants . . . into ever more savage actions.”[\[14\]](#)

How then are Christians to think about war and violence? Let's consider two examples. In the face of much violent opposition in his battle for social justice, Martin Luther King said, "be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. . . . We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win *you* in the process."[\[15\]](#) Reform was achieved, although at the cost of his life, and many hearts and minds have been changed.

However, another martyr, German minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, rejected pacifism and chose to participate in an attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler, mainly because he despaired that an appeal to the hearts and minds of the Nazis would be effective.

Neither King nor Bonhoeffer were killed specifically for their faith. They were killed for defending the weak from slaughter, as Pearse puts it. Perhaps Pearse is correct when he argues, "If Christians can . . . legitimately fight . . . , then that fighting clearly cannot be for the faith. It can only be for secular causes . . . faith in Christ is something for which we can only die—not kill. . . . To fight under the delusion that one is thereby promoting Christianity is to lose sight of what Christianity is."[\[16\]](#)

Notes

1. Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 16.
2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 14.
5. Ibid., 31.
6. Ibid., 53.
7. Ibid., 54.
8. Ibid., 55.
9. Ibid., 134.
10. Ibid., 58.

11. Ibid., 59.
12. Ibid., 173.
13. Ibid., 175.
14. Ibid., 173.
15. Ibid., 180.
16. Ibid.

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Trusting God on the Other Side of Bizarre

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

how much energy I had! What a poignant reminder of how exhausting tears are, and why people overtaken by tears need to be given extra-large doses of grace and compassion.

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

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

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

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

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

I have been begging God for no cancer in the lymph nodes, but what if He says no? What if my path goes into the radiology unit?

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

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

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

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

I honestly don't think it's about gaining more information about God or learning more life lessons. I think it's about building my character and perseverance. I think it's about growing my roots deeper in my dependence on Christ and

maturing me spiritually, to make me more like Him. That's the spiritual fruit that the Lord wants to see His people bear, I think.

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

This blog post originally appeared at
<https://blogs.bible.org/trusting-god-on-the-other-side-of-bizarre/> on March 22, 2023.

Theistic Evolution – Part 2

Dr. Ray Bohlin reviews a second science critique of Theistic Evolution, asking if universal common descent is real. The evidence says no.

The Fossil Record and Universal Common Ancestry

In a previous article, I examined [the failure of neo-darwinism](#) on the basis of the landmark book ***Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique.***[\[1\]](#)

In this article, I'm reviewing the second science critique of theistic evolution. This section asks whether universal common descent or UCD is real. Universal common descent simply states that all organisms today are descended from one or a few early organisms by Darwinian evolution. UCD is usually if not always vigorously defended by theistic evolutionists, or, as they now prefer, "evolutionary creationists." UCD is considered beyond question. And doubters of UCD are compared



to flat earthers and those who believe the sun and planets revolve around the earth. In this section I'll review the first chapter in this section by Gunter Bechly and Stephen C. Meyer.

Bechly and Meyer simply ask if the fossil record records this smooth transition from a single common ancestor to all life forms today. They survey numerous gaps in the fossils where certain large groups appear suddenly again, and again, and again. When a variety of new forms appear, the fossil record is full of gaps. In an old earth perspective, which theistic evolutionists adopt, one of these gaps goes back to the earliest life on earth. Fossils of bacteria show up 3.8 billion years ago right after the Late Heavy Bombardment of the earth by asteroids from 4.1 billion years ago to 3.8 billion years ago. This leaves virtually no time for the origin of that first life.

Let's jump ahead to the Cambrian Explosion where nearly all animal Phyla show up in the fossil record suddenly, with no ancestors, 450 million years ago. Arthropods, Mollusks, Annelids, Chordates, and many others just show up, already fully differentiated from each other, with few clues of which phyla are most closely related to other phyla.

Then there is the Silurian-Devonian Radiation of Terrestrial Biotas. Here vascular land plants show up suddenly with no clue as to how and when they transitioned from marine plants to land plants.

Then there are the flowering plants. Charles Darwin called their sudden appearance in the Cretaceous period "an abominable mystery."

There are more problems in the animal kingdom. All the orders of mammals with placentas suddenly show up in a narrow time window, too narrow to have evolved from earlier animals. A paleontologist said, "Within approximately 15 million years of

dinosaur extinction most of the 20 orders of placentals had appeared.” And last, the orders of modern birds show up all at once in the fossil record around the same time. Whew, more tomorrow.

Universal Common Descent: A Comprehensive Critique (Part 1)

In this section I’m reviewing Casey Luskin’s chapter called “Universal Common Descent: A Comprehensive Critique.”

In this chapter, Luskin covers four main topics:

- evidence against common descent from biogeography,
- the fossil record,
- molecular phylogenies, and
- embryology.

Since I covered the fossil record in the above section, I’ll focus on biogeography here and molecular phylogenies in the next.

Why would biogeography even be considered by theistic evolutionists as evidence of common ancestry? Well, it was used by Darwin, when he saw that the fossil mammals in South America resembled the animals living on the continent today. Luskin looks at a most glaring example of a severe problem in this category, Platyrrhine monkeys. Two families have prehensile tails, which can grasp things like tree branches while their four limbs perform other tasks. While some old-world monkeys have tails, they are not prehensile.

The new world monkeys are said to have arrived in South America about 30 million years ago. At that time however, Africa and South America were at least 600 miles apart. So how did the platyrrhine monkeys, supposedly recently evolved from

old-world monkeys, cross the ocean? The usual response is to suggest that a group or even a single pregnant female rafted on some fallen trees and brush.

This seems incredibly improbable. First, it would require these branches or shrubs to provide food for at least one pregnant female. This drifting pile of branches would take several weeks or most probably months to drift from Africa to South America. This incredible hypothesis is offered because these two groups of monkeys are supposedly related by common ancestry, but on different sides of the ocean. So, there must be a way to preserve common ancestry of these two groups of monkeys no matter how improbable.

Biogeography hurts UCD far more than it helps.

Universal Common Descent: A Comprehensive Critique – (Part 2)

In this section on Casey Luskin's chapter on Universal Common Descent, my focus is on evidence from molecular phylogenies, where molecules like genes and proteins are compared to create trees based on molecules, not anatomy. Scientists can now determine the amino acid sequence of proteins and the nucleotide sequence of the gene that codes for the protein.

Previously, Darwin's tree of life was constructed by comparing anatomical similarities and differences to determine where a species or group of species belonged in the tree. And since it was thought that genes determine the anatomical structure of an organism, a tree constructed by comparing the gene sequences of a protein should give the same tree as the anatomical tree. This was the expectation of numerous scholars.

However, there has been no agreement between anatomical and

gene sequence trees except with very closely related species. Molecular phylogenies for different proteins reveal contradictory trees. Now, many scientists have abandoned Darwin's tree of life. In 1999, W. Ford Doolittle offered that "Molecular phylogenists will have failed to find the 'true tree' . . . because the history of life cannot properly be represented as a tree." The problem has only gotten worse. Several authors over the last 25 years are quoted by Luskin^[2]: one said that "Different proteins generate different trees" (1998); another said, "Evolutionary trees from different genes often have conflicting branching patterns," (2009). A third author wrote, "The problem was that different genes told contradictory evolutionary stories" (2009). And finally, a fourth author said, "Evolutionary trees constructed by studying biological molecules often don't resemble those drawn up from morphology."

Many evolutionists have abandoned the tree model altogether, which leaves Universal Common Descent in grave trouble.

Missing Transitions: Human Origins and the Fossil Record

Theistic evolutionists agree that humans show clear evidence of having a common ancestor with chimpanzees. But if humans evolved from an ape-like ancestor, was there a real Adam and Eve? Was there an actual fall? Many evolutionary creationists would say no. They hold that humans evolved from a population of at least 1,000 individuals, not two, and that humans were already sinful and therefore never fell into sin.

Casey Luskin explores whether the fossil record documents a steady series of fossils transforming an ape-like ancestor into humans over the last 6-7 million years.

Luskin focuses on three critical questions about the hominin fossils: first, are there candidates for something very close

to the common ancestor of humans and chimps; second, are the australopithecines intermediates between our ape-like ancestor and us; and last, is there a series of fossils linking australopithecines and humans?

Fragmentary fossils of three possible candidates for a common ancestor between chimps and humans have been found between 6.6 to 4.4 million years ago. But all three were eventually dismissed as simple apes or too fragmentary to draw any conclusions. All these fossils would easily fit inside a child's shoe box.

The second question is, were the australopithecines intermediates between our ape-like ancestor and us? The australopithecines ranged from 4 to 1 million years ago and have long been advertised as on the road to humans. But paleoanthropologists cannot agree about the roles, if any, the australopithecines had in human origins.

The third question asks, is there a series of fossils linking australopithecines and humans?

Homo erectus, the first species in the genus *Homo*, appeared about 1.8 million years ago, but we haven't found *any* potential intermediates between australopithecines and *Homo*. "Although the transition from *Australopithecus* to *Homo* is usually thought of as a momentous transformation, the fossil record bearing on the origin and earliest evolution of *Homo* is virtually undocumented." The so-called evolution of the human species is fragmentary and blotchy.

Evidence for Human Uniqueness

Most evolutionary creationists believe that humans and chimpanzees share a common ancestor around 6-7 million years ago. Above, I addressed the lack of fossil evidence for the human descent from this common ancestor. But equally, evolutionary creationists claim there is powerful evidence

linking humans and chimpanzees, that there is only a 1-2% difference of our DNA, indicating humans and chimps are closely related. Ann Gauger, Ola Hossjer, and Colin Reaves deal with this claim in their chapter, *Evidence for Human Uniqueness*.

This chapter uses an abundance of technical terminology. I will be avoiding many of those terms to save time needing to define them for you. I will be generalizing their discussion as much as possible.

If you simply compare the individual building blocks of DNA called nucleotides, where the sequences match up between human and chimp DNA, there is only a 1.23% difference between humans and chimps. But when you begin to include insertions, deletions, the number and location of repeated elements, as well as the extreme differences between the Y chromosomes of humans and chimps, the difference rises to at least 5%.

It's estimated that there are about 60 genes found in humans that have no similar genes in chimps. It's difficult to get just one unique gene in 6 million years, but 60? Impossible!! There are differences in non-coding DNA, how chromosomes are arranged in the nucleus in cells of different tissues, how genes are regulated, etc. Many of these differences are found in genes expressed in brain tissues.

These genetic differences bring about dozens of anatomical and physiological differences. Our brains are larger and constructed differently; our feet, necks, and location of the skull on the spine are different.

We think about past and future, we play, dance, make music, communicate through language, use symbolic logic, we write novels and poetry, use math and art, and show empathy for others. There are so many more differences. We do not share a common ancestor with chimps. There is not enough time for

evolution bring about all these differences.

I hope that now you are convinced that evolutionary creationist insistence that Universal Common Descent be fully accepted is not based on evidence, just a belief that evolution is true.

Notes

1. J.P. Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann K. Gauger, and Wayne Grudem, Editors. *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.

2. Pp. 380-382.

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Trusting God in the Bizarre

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

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

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

above paragraph.

The oral surgeon who biopsied my tongue is a dear believer from church. When he delivered the bad news to me with amazing tenderness and gentleness, he was “Jesus with skin on” to me. I truly sensed the Lord was telling me through my doctor-now-friend that He was allowing this challenge that was going to be hard, and a lot of work, but He is with me. I was so blessed to be able to freely respond by asking, “Would you please pray for me?” And he did. The first of many, many prayers I have received.

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

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

Early in this cancer journey, Jesus spoke to my heart through Revelation 2:10—“Do not fear what you are about to suffer.” I know He was addressing the church in Smyrna with that verse,

but He pretty much burned it into MY heart when I read it one morning. He knew that, being a pain weenie, I was going to struggle with fear. I have to keep reminding myself of what to do with my fear: Psalm 53:6 says, "When I am afraid, I will trust in You." And in these days of Advent, I get to be reminded frequently through Christmas music that Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us." I need to trust Him; I need to trust IN Him; I need to recall Isaiah 43:1-5, where He says, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you." Just like I used to soothe my frightened children when they were small with, "It's OK, it's OK, Mommy's with you."

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

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

Instead of a women's Christmas Coffee at church, we were blessed to have 25 hostesses open their homes in multiple cities and multiple zip codes for 25 teachers to share the same basic message that each of us made our own. In my final point, about abiding in Christ, I was able to hold up an IV bag and tubing to illustrate what abiding is like: Jesus said

He is the vine, we are the branches. Our job as branches is to stay connected so His “supernatural sap” can flow into us. Just like when we’re hooked up to an IV, our job is to stay connected. I asked my hostess’s husband to record that part of my message as well as my application about abiding in Christ as I wrestle with this cancer. I was able to edit it down to 6 minutes and post it on Facebook with a request for prayer.

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

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

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

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

I have been in this place of experiencing peace from the prayers of God’s people before. My last trip to Belarus, before I lost the ability to walk, I posted a request for people to pray daily for me for “stair grace.” There are few

elevators in Belarus, and the building where we were staying and teaching had two flights of stairs I had to climb several times a day. I asked for 10 people to pray, and 70 promised they would support me through prayer. And boy did they ever. It was amazing how easy it was to go up and down stairs for almost two weeks.

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

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

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/trusting-god-in-the-bizarre/ on December 20, 2022.

Probe Live: Truth Decay



PROBE MINISTRIES
INVITES YOU TO

TRUTH DECAY: POSTMODERNISM, RELATIVISM, AND PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY



Kerby Anderson, host of nationally broadcast radio show Point of View and president of Probe Ministries, will discuss how these ideas have infiltrated the church.

THURSDAY DEC 1, 7PM

THE HOPE CENTER

2001 W PLANO PKWY, PLANO, TX 75075

Join us for the next Probe Live event

Thursday, December 1, 2022

7:00 p.m.

The Hope Center, Plano TX

We encounter postmodern thinking when we share the gospel and then hear, "That's your truth, but it's not my truth." Moral relativism surfaces when someone says, "That may be your morality, but it's not my morality," or "Who are you to say abortion or homosexuality is wrong?" And progressive Christians deny absolute moral truth and therefore question the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Probe Ministries President Kerby Anderson will provide an overview of these faulty ways of thinking and answer questions from the audience.

We will record this message but not live stream it.

3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth

Paul Rutherford suggests using three fulfilled biblical prophecies as an apologetic for biblical truth: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide surrounding His birth.

Pine scent inside my home, the quick defensive tightening of my skin as I walk outside into the cold brisk air, and then the reflexive opposite – the slow relaxation of my whole body as I stand in front of a fire warming myself.

These experiences during the holidays warm my heart.



As we look toward Christmas and hear the nativity story this season, I want to share with you one conversation starter I use to defend my faith.

Let me share it with you. It's rather simple. It's easy to remember because it comes entirely out of Matthew's second chapter. It's not long and involved either—just three points.

Skeptics ridicule the Bible for its many supposed “errors,” “holes,” and “inconsistencies.” They conclude that it's

unreliable. Sharing this quick three-point apologetic can assure them that the Bible is reliable and can be trusted.

If the Bible makes three prophecies and then records the fulfillments of those prophecies, don't you think that makes the book at least a little bit credible? That's what you can do citing just the Christmas story from Matthew 2.

You might be tempted to dismiss this, saying it doesn't matter. But here's why the reliability of Scripture matters. IF Scripture can be trusted, AND what it is says is true, then some of the recorded teachings of Jesus could radically alter your life.

In Matthew 10:39 Jesus said, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Or Luke 14:27, "Whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple."

Does that mean the disciple of Jesus has to lose his life?!! In a sense, yes.

How's that for radical?! If the Bible is reliable, then that means your life is at stake. Literally. That's not exaggeration: your physical life and your spiritual life. Both.

So there's a lot at stake then, if what the Bible says is true. Let's take a look, then, shall we?

Matthew's account of the Christmas story records three distinct fulfillments of prophecy: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide surrounding His birth. We'll consider these one at a time.

Jesus Born in Bethlehem

Your life hangs in the balance of the Bible's reliability. That's why this discussion matters—whether or not the Bible is

reliable. The Christmas story from Matthew 2 offers strong evidence that the Bible is true.

Today we get into the first of three instances in the Christmas story that point to the miraculous fulfillment of prophecy strictly surrounding Jesus' birth—namely the location of His birth, Bethlehem.

The gospel writer, Matthew, begins chapter two telling the story of the Magi—the fabled wise men from the East who came to worship the King of the Jews. They arrive in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital city, expecting to find the baby King. They are disappointed, but redirected to Bethlehem by King Herod's chief priests. Why? Because those priests had read the prophet Micah who foretold the Messiah, the coming King, would come out of Bethlehem.

In Matthew 2:6, the writer is quoting the prophet Micah 5:2.

You may have known Jesus was born in Bethlehem. That's a pretty widely known fact, which is also why it's a great place to start this conversation to make a case for the Bible's reliability. It might sound like this.

"You know Jesus was born in Bethlehem, right?" you could begin. "Well, did you know that was prophesied hundreds of years prior?" Don't worry about trying to remember the citation. Just focus on it being fulfilled prophecy. You can always look up the reference later if you want to. If you want extra credit, go for the prophet's name, Micah.

Some skeptics may grant that Jesus indeed fulfilled prophecy, but that he did so intentionally. That is, skeptics basically charge Jesus with reading the Hebrew prophets, and then deliberately fulfilling as many as he possibly could in order to win favor, influence, and gain a following.

However, this is difficult to achieve when you haven't been born yet! How could he possibly have deliberately fulfilled

anything when he wasn't deliberating anything at all? He wasn't conscious, and didn't even exist yet in the flesh.

So no, Jesus could not have fulfilled this prophecy by Himself in order to deceive and manipulate. What are the chances Jesus' birthplace would fulfill prophecy? Not likely!

Jesus' Flight to Egypt

The second fulfillment of prophecy recorded in Matthew 2 (the Christmas story), is Jesus' flight to Egypt. Practically overnight Jesus' father, Joseph, moves his family out of the country—out of Israel and into Egypt. Here's the text. Matthew 2:14-15.

“So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

International travel back then was not what it is today. Modern conveniences ease travel today and increase comfort, yet it still remains difficult for us. Joseph and Mary, however, risked their very lives in order to relocate internationally. This effort was not undertaken lightly. Joseph was, after all, under orders from an angel.

Question: what do you think are the chances an ancient near-eastern middle-class laborer would embark upon world travel with only a moment's notice? He risked the life of his fiancée. He risked the life of his (adoptive) child, not to mention his own. This kind of journey was highly unusual. So it seems unlikely this scenario would have played out under other circumstances—that it was mere coincidence to fulfill prophecy.

When compared to non-biblical prophecy, this one seems awfully specific. It names the country out of which he is

called—Egypt—not something vague like “foreign country.” No. The prophet Hosea mentions Egypt specifically in chapter 11:1. Further it mentions the gender of the child—a male child, a son.

The specificity of the prophecy and the unlikely nature of the event occurring on its own both point to divine orchestration. This was no accident. The fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus’ birth make the Bible seem a lot more reliable.

Your life is in the balance of the Bible’s reliability. The teachings recorded in this book can save your life. The bigger question is, will you believe them? Do you want to be saved? Do you believe Jesus is Lord and accept His sacrifice on the cross to save you from sin? (If so, please email me at paul@probe.org.) I want to hear from you.

Jesus, Genocide Survivor

Three fulfilled prophecies recorded by Matthew chapter two—in the Christmas story—underscore the reliability of this controversial ancient text. The Christmas story is evidence that the Bible is true.

Today we consider the third prophecy Jesus’ birth story fulfills: namely, that there would be a genocide killing babies. Here’s the text from Matthew 2:16-18.

“Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.’”

The gospel writer, Matthew, is quoting a prophecy of Jeremiah. To decode this passage, first keep in mind that Rachel,

Jacob's wife, was mother to Israel's twelve tribes, and here she is a kind of symbolic mother for all of Israel. The second point to note is that Ramah is located in Bethlehem.

With that in mind, the prophecy foretells of Israel's mothers crying in Bethlehem, mourning the loss of their children. The author draws our attention to the amazing accuracy of this prophecy. Not only does he get right the who and the what—the moms and their weeping because of the lost babies, but he also correctly prophesies the small village! Incredible.

What are the chances Jesus would fulfill this prophecy this specifically? And as we discussed before, if Jesus were no more than a charlatan attempting to self-fulfill these prophecies, how could a man orchestrate something as large-scale as the death of all the baby boys in a village? Plus the Bible records that was Herod's idea. And remember, Herod didn't want Jesus around. Herod was attempting to eliminate potential competition for his throne.

The genocide ordered by the Jewish king, an event that is part of the Christmas story of Jesus' birth, fulfills prophecy. In so doing it shows the Bible is reliable. That's a big deal because the Bible records the story of a very important man—one whom you need to know: Jesus.

Conclusion

We've been discussing how the Christmas story indicates the Bible is true. We've done that by considering three instances recorded in Matthew 2 that fulfill Old Testament prophecy.

First, the prophet Micah prophesied the coming Ruler would come out of Bethlehem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Matthew 2:1 records that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Second, the prophet Hosea prophesied that the Messiah would be called out of Egypt. Jesus' father Joseph moved infant Jesus to Egypt to flee the coming baby genocide. When it was safe,

Joseph was instructed in a dream to return. So Jesus was called out of Egypt. (Matthew 2:14)

Then thirdly, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied all the mothers in Bethlehem would mourn the loss of their children. Matthew 2:16 records that after King Herod learns the news of Jesus' birth, he orders all infant boys in Bethlehem killed.

What are the chances of one man fulfilling ALL of those prophecies? Not likely! If you want more, read Josh McDowell's book *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. He records 61 prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. In it he quotes professor Peter Stoner who calculated the probability of Jesus fulfilling just eight prophecies. He illustrates the likelihood this way. Cover the state of Texas in two feet of silver dollars. Mark just one silver dollar. Now choose one silver dollar at random from anywhere in the state. The chances of picking up the marked silver dollar on the first try are the same as Jesus fulfilling just eight Old Testament prophecies. Not happening!

We have good evidence that what the Bible records is accurate. It will stand up to criticism that Jesus attempted to fulfill prophecy on his own, to position himself as a teacher with authority, influence, or to gain a following. But the fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy we discussed cannot be intentionally self-fulfilled. They either occurred before He was born, or were entirely out of His control.

Do you now believe in Jesus because you listened to this? Email me. I'd love to hear from you (paul@probe.org). Are you already His disciple? God has a unique purpose for your life, only you can fulfill. You are his ambassador. Share the good news. Your life is not the only one at stake. Your neighbor's is too. Have you shared with him or her yet? Take your next step of faithfulness today, whatever that is. I am praying you do.

You now have a great conversation starter to help you get

there. The Christmas story is tremendous evidence for biblical truth.

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Learning to Lean Hard—AGAIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I often advise people to "lean hard on Jesus" regardless of the reason, but especially in times of trial and crisis. Sometimes they wonder, What does that look like? Legit question!

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

non-slippery surfaces.

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

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

But there was another lesson coming.

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

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

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

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

I laughed . . . and then the next time, instead of leaning on

self-sufficiency I asked for help. Because leaning on Jesus means, among many other things, that He helps me spurn self-sufficiency and ask for help.

The lessons continue.

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

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/learning-to-lean-hard-again/ on November 16,
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