5 Biblical Ways to Defend Your Mental Health Against Ongoing World Conflicts

As mental health issues continue to spread throughout our society and the world, Terrence Harris shares 5 important and practical Biblical insights to help protect your mental health, considering the ongoing wars and conflicts we see today.

1. Mental Health Needs God's Truth

God's truth demands obedience, even against personal preference. Repentance and faith in Jesus Christ gives us new life and compels us to joyfully obey God's truth. Christ offers salvation to those who receive Him as Lord and Savior. Some think they can save the world by their own actions. Many hope to make the world a better place through charity or a perverted version of peace, love and unity. Any vision of peace that denies the return of Christ rejects the truth and ultimately collapses.

World conflicts aren't just a political issue—they are the result of humanity rejecting God's truth and replacing it with deception. The Bible speaks of a humanity that desires everything they see, physical pleasures, and the pride of life. All of these come from a sinful world that refuses to obey and submit to the Living God (1 John 2:16, 17). Consequently, we live in a decaying world (2 Peter 3:10, 1 Corinthians 7:31) of which no human can control or stop.

Anxiety, another symptom of humanity's brokenness, exists as a major issue within the mental health crisis today. Anxiety can express itself through a sensation of "being choked" and suffocating. Those who suffer from anxiety, like I once did, tend to also experience the sensation of "falling." Without

anchoring ourselves in God's truth, our emotions begin to interpret reality instead of responding to it.

Medication helped during my struggle with anxiety and mental health issues, but I improved when I relied less on my truth and more on God's truth. He has full authority over heaven and earth. Humanity assumes absolute control over our lives because we take God's grace for granted. This illusion of control contradicts the truth that God alone has authority over heaven and earth. When we align our lives with God's truth, we can experience freedom from the pressure to hold everything together on our own. This reduces and even frees us from undue stress and worry.

2. When Community Grows, Mental Health Improves

Some people serve in the military overseas, have loved ones fighting, or worry about the war's impact on American soil. Navigating war's presence and uncertainty is challenging. While war and violence exist, God doesn't want us to bear these challenges alone. Sometimes, a kind reminder that fear doesn't come from God (2 Timothy 1:7) is needed. If fear arises, remember God's love and care through others (Galatians 6:2, Hebrews 10:24-25). Having a solid group of family, friends, and trusted people is wise (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). Helping each other through hard times keeps our mental health from
deteriorating because God created humanity for connection. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have distinct functions but exist as one. Togetherness and community are essential to the Living God. Created in His image, humanity must imitate God's likeness, seeking and building meaningful, God-honoring relationships, unity, and community in Christ.

3. Solitude: Where Mental Health Speaks

Jesus sought solitude to spend time with the Father (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, Mark 14:23).

Solitude differs from isolation. The Bible says isolating oneself is foolish and contrary to God's standard for community. Biblical solitude seeks intimacy with God, hearing His voice, experiencing His presence, and minimizing distractions. Finding sacred time to enjoy God's company improves mental health. This connects our hearts to the Father who made us and our interests. Ask God for solutions to mental health and navigating the world's brokenness.

4. Fasting: A Secret Weapon Against Mental Oppression

Jesus said, "When you fast and pray . . ." His words sound like a command, not an option.

Christians tend to focus on the physical benefits of fasting rather than the supernatural benefits. Queen Esther called for the Jews to fast on her behalf before entering her king's throne room uninvited—which could have resulted in her death (Esther 4:15-17). All the people of Ninevah (Jonah 3:5-10) fasted and repented for sinning after hearing Jonah preach, turning God's coming judgment away from the city. Daniel fasted while mourning and for understanding (Daniel 10:2). In Mark 9:29 (in some manuscripts), Jesus tells His disciples that prayer and fasting invites supernatural authority in deliverance from demonic oppression. Fasting exchanges the natural pleasures of food for a complete focus on God. Sometimes, our mental health needs relief from anxiety or comfort from life's hardships—especially in times of world conflicts. Other times, we may need God's mercy, favor, or His supernatural strength to overcome the challenges of an immaterial nature. Scripture has shown how fasting can turn the tides of worldly conflicts and challenging circumstances. Incorporating a fast that Yahweh commands and respects could be the spiritual discipline necessary for life's journey.

5. Enjoying Life: A Gift for Mental Health

No matter the difficulties we face in life, we can still trust

and believe that God gave us life to appreciate and enjoy, as well as experiences to enjoy along with it. In Ecclesiastes 5:18–21, we can discover a desirable pattern, one blessed by Yahweh that most Christians may overlook. One of the best things you can do for your mental health is to enjoy the work you do, developing the ability to enjoy the wealth it produces, and using the resources to create wonderful and exciting memories and experiences for yourself, your family, and others.

Unstable circumstances cannot sustain mental health in a world marked by ongoing conflict, uncertainty, and moral confusion. The wars and tensions we see around us reveal a deeper reality—humanity's rejection of God's truth. When we try to carry the weight of a broken world or place our hope in human solutions, mental health issues such as anxiety increase, and peace fades. But God has not left us without help. When we anchor our minds in His truth, walk in community, seek Him in solitude, practice spiritual discipline through fasting, and choose to enjoy the life He has given, we begin to experience stability in our mental health that the world cannot offer. True peace exists outside of trying to control outcomes, but in trusting the God who is already in control. As we align our lives with His truth, we protect our minds, strengthen our faith, and learn to live with confidence—even in the midst of a world at war.

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Be WHAT?

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

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

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

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

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

Huh?

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

How does one obey a command like that?

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

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

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

We can't do it. Jesus wasn't kidding when he said in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in Me and I abide in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing."

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

How was the leper cleansed? Jesus took his leprosy into

Himself, I think, exchanging His health and "leprosy-freeness" for the man's horrible sickness. Jesus' holiness and perfection destroyed the leprosy the way bleach destroys mold and mildew. The point is, Jesus did it.

"Be Not Afraid"

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

We can't. But Jesus can.

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

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

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

"Be Strong"

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

We see the full story in Ephesians 6:10, which literally says, "[B]e being strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of

His power.” The verb is present passive imperative, which means we are told to move out of the driver’s seat and let the Lord drive. Let Him be strong in us; let Him pour the power of His might into and through us.

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

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

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

“Be Not Discouraged”

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

I love this passage in 2 Chronicles 32:7—

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

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

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

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

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

"Be Anxious for Nothing"

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

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

The antidote for anxiety is to tell God what we're concerned

about, but not to stop there: also focus on and deepen our understanding of just how loving, kind and generous the Father is toward us.

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

“Be Transformed”

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

Oh look, there’s another “Be _____” command! Be perfect! Yikes! How can we do that?

By being transformed.

How do we do *that*?

By asking for it. By inviting the Holy Spirit to make us like Jesus and His Father. By responding with repentance when He convicts us of sin and righteousness, which is His job (John 16:8). By “taking off” the old thinking habits and behaviors that are displeasing to God, and “putting on” the new habits and behaviors that align with the heart and character of God—which we learn about as we get to know Him in His word. And we take off and put on with the Spirit’s empowering, not our own efforts.

There’s an important thread to obeying all these “Be _____” commands: God does the work in us, with our cooperation, as we surrender and submit to Him.

Philippians 2:13 tells us that God is at work in us, both to

will and to work for His good pleasure. He gives us “the want-to and the can-do.” He’s the one who enables us to live out His commands to “Be _____.”

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

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/be-what/ on June 21, 2023.

Trusting God in the Bizarre

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

minutes and post it on Facebook with a request for prayer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The story continues . . . in God’s loving hands. . . as I continue to trust Him in the bizarre.

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Living With a Sense of Urgency

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

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

Cerebral atrophy.

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

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



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

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

I had begun two books and had fallen into the writers' bane of

procrastination. Now, I wondered if I would have time, if I would still remember all I needed to complete them. Suddenly, I craved time. I wanted more. I was frustrated by the mundane necessities that took me away from the activities that screamed for my time *now*.

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

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

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

I spent time rededicating my two daughters to God and praying my own dedication of my children's children to Him. I told God

over and over, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” longing for assurance that even when my mind was gone, I had done all I could to leave behind a legacy that would point them to the Lord I love. A legacy that would ensure we would all be reunited one day in a world that shines with the light of the glory of God when my renewed mind would know and recognize them.

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

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

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

loving relationship with God.

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

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

Since that sweet reprieve, I must admit, I have slipped a bit in my sense of urgency. The desire to sort through stacks of books that clutter my new apartment, the necessity of making a living, the need for rest after a day or work, and countless everyday nuisances crowd my life and scream for attention. However, the experience has changed me. I no longer take my days, my hours for granted. My desire to leave a legacy of worth has changed the way I pray and spend my time. I continue to plan ways to ensure that my faith will live beyond me. I pray that God will show Himself through me in my little sphere of influence. I have not lessened the prayers for my family, especially my daughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren. God put *me*, with all my flaws, talents, life experiences, joys, sorrows, and foibles onto this earth for a reason—a purpose that He designed *me* to fulfill. I seek to savor each moment God gives me to love and live for Him. That is my sense of urgency. It is my prayer every morning before my feet hit the floor that this day my life will not be spent in my own pursuits but will be only a conduit for Him to touch those He places in my path.

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

What Does Trusting God Look Like?

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

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

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

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

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

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

on our own understanding, leaning hard into Him instead.

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

I get leaning.

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

So trusting means CHOOSING.

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

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

Choosing to Trust

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

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

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

Pressing hard is a picture of trust.

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

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

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

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

One of my fellow Bible study leaders shared this gem:

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

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

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

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

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



What a picture of trust as clinging!

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

Reminding Ourselves of What is True

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Continuing to Choose to Trust

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It’s leaning,

It’s clinging.

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

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

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

From Fears to Tears

In a previous blog post, I’m Scared, Lord, I wrote about my apprehensions concerning my upcoming hip replacement surgery. My doctor was cheerfully confident that I would not experience the post-operative pain I was afraid of, but I was all-too-aware of my potential complications. As a polio survivor, I’m twice as sensitive to pain as those whose brains were not infected by the poliovirus. On top of that, I was extremely aware of the fact that my severely arthritic hips had become basically frozen, leaving me with a limited range of motion. I knew that the surgeon and her team would be moving my legs in all kinds of unnatural (to me) contortions during the surgery, and I was extremely concerned about how my muscles and ligaments might scream in protest once I woke up from surgery. So I was scared.

But when I shared my fears with God’s people, hundreds of them graciously prayed for me, and the Lord swept away my fears like blowing away smoke. Suddenly the fear was gone and I was graced with a very matter-of-fact willingness to just get ‘er

done. It was amazing. I was held in my Father's gentle and loving cuddle, and I walked in peace the remaining days until the surgery. Metaphorically walked, that is. I hadn't physically walked for well over a year because of pain and weakness.

Well, it has now been over a week since my surgery, and every day I stand amazed at the healing grace and pain-control grace of my gracious Lord. Not a metaphorical standing, either. For the first time in two years, I am able to stand upright and pain free. I try to maintain an awareness of the huge grace in which I stand, marveling at the privilege of being able to once more stand at the sink to wash my hands or brush my teeth. My recovery has gone exceptionally well. I'm able to walk with the aid of a walker and each day the distance I can walk grows longer. Soon I'll be able to go home from the inpatient rehabilitation facility I've been in—once we figure out how to get me into our car.

But I was not prepared for what kept happening in the therapy gym: tears.

I was flummoxed by the unbidden tears that sprang to my eyes the first time a physical therapist asked me to exercise my polio leg in the same way I had just moved my surgery leg. I knew I couldn't; I don't have the strength, and never have. My left leg was originally paralyzed when I got polio as an infant, and it barely functions. But I also live with the mindset of trying to do what people ask me to do, and the clash of those two realities rose up in sadness and frustration that leaked out my eyes. It was rather embarrassing. I didn't know what was going on, I just knew my heart was a storm of unhappy feelings.

When the therapist asked me to climb a two-inch step and I didn't have enough pain meds in me for that, the stabbing pain in my surgery leg rose up through my body and exited through my eyes in tears again. It seemed that tears were just under

the surface, ready to leak out at the slightest provocation, for two days.

I was so confused! What in the world was going on? Where were all these tears coming from?

It was my husband who provided the answer, and I thank the Lord for using Ray to bring clarity to my maelstrom of emotion. He texted me, “Honey, you have lived with decades of loss you have learned to manage. Now the loss is renewed and you now are reminded further of the loss in ways you haven’t dealt with for a lifetime. Polio sucks. I understand.”

That was it! The pain of loss is *grief*. I was grieving the impact of polio’s losses on my life yet again, this time with a freshly painful punch: polio is now interfering with my recovery from surgery. Other people can just use their other leg to support themselves and climb into a mini-van with its higher seats—no problem! I don’t have that choice. That’s a loss. When asked to do the same exercise with both legs, other people can do that, but I don’t have that choice. That’s another loss.

I manage to navigate the losses of polio for months and sometimes years at a time without having to actively think about it, allowing me the luxury of not having to face my grief every day. But that luxury has been taken away today and I want to be real and honest about where I am. I live in a fallen world where the evidence of sin’s destructive impact on our world is everywhere. My grief, the pain of my losses, is part of that fallen world. But what is also part of that fallen world is God’s promise that He would never leave me or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5). He tells me He is “the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6).

I remind myself of my new life verse that just seems to incredibly appropriate for one whose body is compromised:

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

I cried today. I let the tears fall as the grief flowed. But then I chose not to lose heart, because this momentary, light affliction is producing for me an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

It's gonna be okay.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/from_fears_to_tears on June 26, 2018.

I'm Scared, Lord

My daughter-in-love recently sent me a video of my son introducing their new Golden Retriever puppy to a swimming pool in which he coaxes little Judah, "Don't be scared! Bohlins don't get scared!"

. . . While I've been working on this blog post about being scared. Well yeah, sometimes we do.

For four years I've been living with the pain of severe arthritis and the late effects of polio (muscle weakness, pain, and fatigue). In a few weeks, Lord willing, I will have hip replacement surgery. When my husband had his hip replaced,

he was in excellent physical condition and his experience was as close to perfect as you can get.

But I'm in a different place physically. I haven't walked in a year. I haven't been able to stand up straight for a couple of years, and even lying flat in bed is extremely uncomfortable. My pelvis and hip joints have lost the flexibility that is a sign of good health, and I just don't know how my post-polio will affect recovery from surgery.

On top of this, I'm a pain weenie. It turns out that the poliovirus affected everything in my body, including pain receptors, and we polio survivors are twice as sensitive to pain as everyone else. So . . . yeah, I'm scared of what I will wake up to after surgery.

My fear level kept rising. It didn't help when people would ask, "Are you excited about your surgery? To get rid of the pain?" No! No, I'm not excited, I'm actually quite fearful of the post-op pain, and not knowing what to expect from physical rehab.

One thing I've learned in life, though, is that if we're focused on our fears and anxieties, it's because we're leaving God out of the equation. He gives no grace for "what ifs" and our vain imaginations of potential scenarios where any number of things could go wrong.

That's why worrying is a sin.

And the Bible says "fear not" 365 times.

So what do I do with my "scaredness"? [Note: Microsoft Word really, really wants to keep flipping "scaredness" to "sacredness." Not the same thing. Not by a long shot.]

I sensed the Lord nudging me to share it.

So I did.

And I discovered, once again, the power of prayer.

It started when I needed a CT scan for the robotic assistance of my surgery, but I couldn't lie flat on the table. The pain was unbearable. So I rescheduled the procedure and asked the surgeon to prescribe me some heavy pain meds to be able to lie down. I posted a prayer request on Facebook, asking for "lying flat grace." I was able to tell the CT tech that over a hundred people had said they were praying for me—and she could see with her own eyes the answer to their prayers as I was able to lie flat and remain still for the scan.



So I was doing my part, by confessing Psalm 56:3—"When I am afraid, I will trust in You," and reminding myself of the power of Philippians 4:6-7—"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

But, in obedience, I also shared with another large group of people that I was working daily on surrendering my fears of post-op pain and inviting the Lord into my concerns about what lies ahead. Just like with the CT scan. God blessed the others' intercession for me. To my delight, after I shared my struggle with fear, it was evident that lots of people prayed—because the next day I realized that my fear had dissipated like letting air out of a balloon.

The bottom line of this “adventure with God” is that I am learning, yet again, the importance of trusting God and relying on the prayers of others to deal with my fears. The importance of not indulging in scary mental scenarios where pain is bigger than the presence of God Himself. And of choosing to throw myself wholly on the grace of God and keep speaking truth to myself:

It will be worth it.
This too shall pass.
God will help me and uphold me.
It’s going to be okay because God is good.

This blog post originally appeared at https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/im_scared_lord on May 29, 2018.

Free Indeed!

Recently I had the privilege of speaking in a women’s prison. I shared my story which I call, “How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can’t Change.” (How’s that for a topic of interest for incarcerated people?)



But then I was able to speak briefly about what we have in common, a situational loss of freedom. I have lost the ability—the freedom—to walk, and they have temporarily lost the ability—the freedom—to walk out of lockup. Still, even while imprisoned by our situations, Jesus offers *true freedom* that has nothing to do with our circumstances. He promised to His disciples, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." He even said, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:32, 36)

So what does THAT mean?

What was so crazy great about this opportunity to speak to and hug and love on the precious ladies in the women's prison, was that the previous weekend I had given four messages on freedom at a women's retreat at sea. (You can listen to the recordings here, if you like.) So many facets of freedom were already rolling around in my head as I thought about Jesus' offer of freedom to women in prison.

• As we look at our past, Jesus can set us free from guilt when we confess our sins and receive His forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9). He can set us free from shame, that feeling of not just *making* a mistake, but *being* a mistake, when we receive His gift of honor as He showers pleasure and acceptance on us.

• As we look at our present, Jesus can set us free from the "tapes" of lies and misbeliefs that control our lives, as we replace the lies with His truths. For example, a number of the ladies at the retreat had lived in bondage to the lie that they had to be perfect in order to be acceptable. The weight of needing to be perfect is soul-killing because it's impossible for imperfect people to be perfect! But we can be set free by embracing the truth that only God is perfect, so we can let go of the unrealistic expectation that we can ever live perfectly this side of heaven. God knows we will stumble, and He has promised to hold our hand when we do. And beyond that, He understands our longing for perfection is actually a longing for the perfect home of Eden, which we will get to experience on the New Earth we read about in the book of Revelation.



• We can walk in the breathtaking freedom from the soul-crushing imprisonment of unforgiveness by forgiving those who have hurt or offended us. The weight of others' sins against us is bad enough, but Jesus said that if we refuse to forgive, we will be subject to tormentors—demonic torturers (Matthew 18:34-35). When we release our offenders over to Jesus for Him to deal with, we are set free—free indeed!

• As we think about the future, there is glorious freedom when we trust God instead of being controlled by fear. So often, we are in bondage to fear because we want to be in control. We forget that we are not God, wanting to manage not only our own lives but the lives of others. There is freedom in trusting

God instead of trying to control others.

• Proverbs 29:25 assures us that fear of man is a snare. This isn't talking about being afraid of people like some are afraid of heights, or the dark, or spiders. Fear of man is about working for other people's approval and fearing their disapproval. When we look to Jesus, though, we see how He modelled living for "an audience of One," caring only about pleasing His Father (John 8:29). When we follow Christ's example, living to please the Father instead of fickle people, there is freedom! I can personally attest to this. Because of my stubborn attachment to a biblical sexual ethic, I have been slimed online by people who despise God's standards. The slime slides off, though, when I keep my focus on the Lord and, like Jesus in Hebrews 12:2, I can "despise the shame" by refusing to accept it. That's what freedom feels like!

• There is true freedom in accepting God's choices for our lives: personality and temperament, introversion or extroversion, health limitations, even capacity. (Some people naturally have a "gallon" energy tank, while others naturally have a cup.) Resenting and fighting God's choices—even gender!—leads to expending mental and emotional energy that is restricting and costly. But embracing God's right to make these decisions for our design and our lives, laying down our non-existent "right" to define ourselves the way WE want, brings us freedom.



• One of my dear friends discovered, in the process of working through the challenges of parenting a prodigal adult child, that there is freedom in owning 100% of our own part and 0% of other people's choices and behaviors. There's no point in taking on guilt or responsibility for someone else's choices; they are completely responsible for their part.

• And finally (though definitely not exhaustively), we are free to choose our attitudes. We can decide to either live in bondage to an attitude of entitlement or a continual expectation of the negative, or live in freedom by developing an attitude of gratitude. I love Dr. Charles Swindoll's poem on Attitude:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude
on life.
Attitude, to me, is more important than facts.
It is more important than the past,
than education, than money,
than circumstances, than failure, than successes,
than what other people think or say or do.
It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill.
It will make or break a company . . . a church . . . a home.
The remarkable thing is we have a choice
everyday regarding the attitude
we will embrace for that day.
We cannot change our past . . .
we cannot change the fact that people
will act in a certain way.

We cannot change the inevitable.
The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have,
and that is our attitude.
I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me
and 90% of how I react to it.
And so it is with you . . . we are in charge of our Attitudes.

It's possible to be "free indeed." Regardless of your circumstances. Choose the freedom Jesus offers!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/free_indeed on July 25, 2017.

Knowing the End of the Story

Nov. 8, 2011

The other day, on a friend's recommendation, I started watching *So You Think You Can Dance*, which is like *Dancing With the Stars* only with people who actually can dance. I found it on a cable station, and watched several episodes. Then I discovered that I was watching last season's shows, so I googled the program and found out who won.

Knowing the outcome changes the way I view the competition. A judge's critical assessment of a performance is just a bump on the road when I know the dancer will eventually win in the end.

That's one of the many reasons for reading and studying the Bible. When we know how the story is going to end, it helps us process the meaning and impact of the slings and arrows of

living in a fallen world, and we don't have to be undone by them.

We know that in the end, God will set everything right.

In the end, He will see that good triumphs over evil.

In the end, Jesus will be crowned King over all, and He will reign in His kingdom here on earth, and those who have been faithful will be rewarded with opportunities to reign with Him, to serve in His kingdom. (For a mind-blowing explanation of the difference between the kingdom and heaven, check out Curtis Tucker's new book *Majestic Destiny*.)

It is faithfulness that qualifies us for a place in the kingdom (which is different from receiving eternal life, which is a free gift with no strings attached). And faithfulness is proven by our responses to the challenges and tests of this life. It's about choosing to trust in the goodness and love of a sovereign God instead of resorting to our own methods of making life work. It's about resisting temptation to conform to the world's mold. It's about waiting on the Lord's timing instead of taking matters into our own hands when He doesn't seem to be moving fast enough for us.

Knowing how the Big Story will end helps us put the small stories of our lives into perspective. But knowing how we got here, by studying the histories recorded in the Bible, also provides perspective.

I have a friend who is baffled and confused—well, actually, *terrified* is more accurate—because everything she's ever counted on to make life work is being taken away. She finds herself divorced, without custody of her children, no job, and no idea how she will pay next month's rent. None of it makes sense to her.

But I've been reading the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah through Malachi) this year, and what's happening to her makes

a lot of sense to me. God is lovingly taking away all the props that she has been depending on to make life work so that she can learn that that He is good, that He is her provider, that He is enough. And because she doesn't yet know Him—she really just has some ideas about Him—she doesn't know that she can trust Him.

Just as God cured the idolatry of His people by stripping them of all His gifts and benefits that they blindly attributed to the false gods they worshipped, I believe God is removing everything except Himself from my friend's life. It's a scary place, but it doesn't have to be a hopeless place. God has a way of setting up crazy situations where we are given a front-row seat to what He's about to do to reveal His heart to us.

Studying the Bible's stories and lessons helps us see that. Looking backward, and looking forward.

Where there will be dancing!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/knowing_the_end_of_the_story

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"I Believe Every Bad Thing I Hear"

I am the person who unfortunately believes the bad things anyone tells them. I am also the person who will take one minute detail and suddenly base that as evidence of something that I am.

This all started about 4 years ago during worship. The pastor

was singing, “Who the Son sets free is free indeed,” instead I heard, “Who the devil sets free is free indeed.” I ignored it, but then I started thinking, “You are hearing that because you were never a child of God.” And I believed it. I believed that I was predestined for hell and that it must have been because I committed the sin of blasphemy. This took a lot of willpower to not let it take over my life. It came to the point of me only believing that I was only sincere in my life when it came to evil things, that that was who I really was and not a child of God. I am still unsure till this day which is true, and which is a lie.

Unfortunately I walked away from God, and now that I am trying to come back I feel like I can’t. In school, I hang around with a lot of homosexual friends. I never thought anything of it until a friend of mine asked all of us who are straight, “Which of us do you think is gay?” and being the way I am, I immediately thought, “Am I?” And I am now battling over my sexuality. I know that it’s wrong, and I never had any desire for a woman before, but after that conversation with those friends, I find myself attempting to think and act like a lesbian. It’s horrible, but I don’t know how to stop it.

Aside from the homosexuality feeling, I feel as though I am a phony, that my walk with God is fake. Everyone always says that “faith isn’t mental, it’s in your heart and what your spirit knows.” But I feel like my heart is totally hard towards God and that no matter how many times I will say, “Lord make me believe, or Lord please deliver me of all of this garbage,” that he will never listen because my heart is truly not in it. I don’t know if it’s a matter of faith or a matter of my emotions, but I don’t know how to separate the two and just believe and believe that God can deliver me and forgive me for all of the sins that I’ve done. I try to pray and read the bible, but I go to sleep feeling worse off than I did before. I don’t know how to fix it. I am in a depression that I’m honestly not sure I can get out of.

I don’t know where to turn. I am trying to turn to God, but the whole issue of sincerity and insincerity is getting to me and it’s prohibiting me from allowing God to really save me. I don’t want to be evil or unsaved or predestined for hell. But I don’t know how to take myself out of the equation and focus on God and him healing me.

Why can’t he just ignore all of my sins and my unbelief and my insincere feelings and just show me he is God and change me?!?!

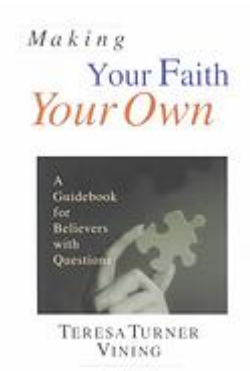
I am so glad you wrote to us! I am so sorry for this place you find yourself. It has to be really hard to be you, at least right now. But I do have an observation and a couple of suggestions I think may help.

The Bible says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). The beliefs you have about yourself and “the way you are,” constitute a filter through which you interpret everything you see and hear. From what you describe, your “flesh filter” (flesh is the human part of us that operates apart from the Spirit of God; it’s broken and unredeemable, which is why it needs to be crucified with Christ) is exceptionally susceptible to suggestion. You easily believe things whether they are true or not simply because the thought is in your head. It doesn’t matter if it came from your own heart or from the outside as a spiritual attack, your filter tags all thoughts as valid and true. (Which is also a problem in college, where you hear things that are not true all the time but you don’t know they’re not true!)

Where does that come from?

From not being grounded in truth. You don’t know what is true, so you can’t identify what is a lie. Lots of people try to make faith a warm fuzzy emotion of the heart, but that’s not the kind of biblical faith Jesus called us to. Faith is radical trust based on evidence that God is trustworthy.

That's one reason Jesus calls us to love God with our minds: we need to actively engage with the evidence for His existence and evidence of His love for us. And that's why your prayers, as well-intentioned as they are, aren't being answered. God doesn't want you to passively sit back and let Him do all the work, because He will not do for us what He calls us to do for ourselves. Asking Him to make you believe is like showing up on the _____ campus and expecting the school to educate you while you stay in your room without going to class or studying. Does that make sense?



I want to recommend an excellent resource to you that will help build your faith by wrestling with the truth that will allow your faith to rest on the fact that it's TRUE and not some warm fuzzy feeling. Teresa Vining wrote *Making Your Faith Your Own* after having some similar struggles to yours while she was in college. www.ccel.us/makingyrfaith.toc.html and www.amazon.com/Making-Your-Faith-Own-Guidebook/dp/0830823263/

Concerning your struggle with your sexual identity: it's important that you speak the truth to yourself. God made you a female, designed to connect meaningfully with both women and men in different ways. The erotic/romantic connection is intended to be strictly between men and women. You are not a lesbian, you are being tempted with same-sex feelings that are coming from outside you (spiritual warfare). They may be strong, but they are not true. Truth is reality as God sees it, and He made you a heterosexual woman. This is the same line of thinking (helping people see and commit to what is true rather than their feelings) that we teach in the ministry

I serve with that helps same-sex-attracted people deal with unwanted homosexuality.

I hope you find this helpful. I send this with a prayer that you will know that God loves you, He is for you, and there is hope for getting out of this dark place as you walk into His light.

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

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