Overcoming Anxiety: Finding Real Peace When Life Seems Crazy

What makes you feel anxious? Being late or unprepared for work or appointments? Maybe unresolved interpersonal conflict. Airline travel? Public speaking? Fears of losing love? Serious illness or a friend's death?

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

What makes you feel anxious? Being late or unprepared for work or appointments? Maybe unresolved interpersonal conflict. Airline travel? Public speaking? Fears of losing love? Serious illness or a friend's death?

Pressures from the trivial to the traumatic can prompt feelings of fearfulness or apprehension.

Once at a booksellers convention my wife and I spent an exhausting day on our feet promoting a new book. Late that night, after a reception crowd had thinned down to mostly authors and our publisher, we stood in a circle engaged in conversation. I had to leave her side momentarily to attend to a matter.

Upon returning to the circle, I walked up behind my wife and began gently to massage her shoulders. She seemed to enjoy this, so I started to put my arms around her waist to give her a little hug. Just then, I looked up at the opposite side of the circle and saw … my wife.

I had my hands on the wrong woman!

In that instant, I knew the true meaning of fear. Fear of circumstances. Even fear of death! Confusion clouded my mind.

Heat enveloped my back, shoulders, neck and head. My face reddened; my stomach knotted.

You've probably had embarrassing moments that generate anxiety. What about more serious causes?

Your Greatest Fear?

Fear of death is perhaps humans' greatest fear. In college, the student living next door to me was struck and killed instantly by lightening on a golf course one springtime afternoon. Shock gripped our fraternity house. "What does it mean if life can be snuffed out in an instant?" my friends asked. "Is there a life after death and, if so, how can we experience it?" Confusion and anxiety reigned.

If you can't answer the question "What will happen when you die?" you may become anxious.

How can you find real peace in a chaotic world? Consider a possible solution. It involves the spiritual realm.

As a university student, I wrote a paper for an abnormal psychology class investigating a biblical therapy for anxiety. I had come to faith as a freshman and found it brought me peace of mind. Complex psychological disorders often stem from more basic problems like anxiety, problems for which faith offers practical solutions.

I sent a copy of my paper to the author of our textbook, a prominent UCLA psychologist. A month later, he replied that he liked the paper and asked permission to quote from it in his revised textbook.

Somewhat amazed, I readily agreed. I also sent a copy of his letter to my parents in Miami, who were beginning to wonder about their son's campus spiritual involvement.

This professor felt that the principles in the paper—which

certainly were not original with me—had both academic and personal relevance. Several months later, we met at his lovely home in Malibu overlooking the Pacific Ocean. As we sat in his back yard, this professor told me he lacked personal peace and wanted to know God personally. I showed him a simple four-point outline based on one of Jesus' statements: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."{1}

We discussed God's unconditional love for us, our dilemma of being unplugged from Him and the flaws (selfishness and "sins") that result. I noted that Jesus, through His death in our place and return to life, came to plug us back into God by paying the penalty we owed for our sins.

Finding Real Peace

This professor decided to place his faith in God and asked Jesus to forgive him and enter his life. We kept in touch. Later, over the phone, he told me that as he looked out over the ocean and saw the setting sun, "I really believe I'm a part of all this. Before I didn't, but now I do." He was seeing how he fit into God's universe. An internationally acclaimed scholar linked up with, if you will, the greatest Psychologist.

One of Jesus' earlier followers wrote to some friends about a divine aid for anxiety: "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."{2}

Faith in God does not make life perfect and is no automatic solution to anxiety. Illness, chemical imbalance, emotional wounds and more can hamper coping. But a good starting place is to become linked with the One who loves us and knows best

what makes us fulfilled.

Might it be time for you to consider Him?

Notes

1. John 3:16 *NLT* (*New Living Translation*).
2. Philippians 4:6-7 (*NLT*).

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9/11 and You

My sister had a 9:00 a.m. appointment at the World Trade Center.

On September 12.

Since September 11, 2001, I've often wondered what might have happened had her appointment been a day earlier or the terrorist attacks a day later. I could have been walking the streets of New York City with her picture.

What were your feelings that tragic day? Shock? Fear? Anger? Confusion? Sadness? How do you process those feelings now, as reminders of the attacks come in anniversary commemorations and media coverage? Nearly two-thirds of American Red Cross 9/11 adult counselees still grieve, according to a study of those directly affected by the attacks{1}.

"I Hate You!"

In the immediate aftermath, my feelings of sadness blended with intense hostility. Once when Osama Bin Laden's face

appeared on television, I spontaneously shouted, “I hate you!”

I was and am a follower of Jesus. He taught his followers to “love your enemies.”{2} Why was I yelling “I hate you!” to a picture on a TV screen?

I wondered why this guy hated my sister. If Deborah Wright had been among the victims, her death would have been included among those he applauded. If I had been a victim, he would have applauded mine. I wrote a radio series on “Why Radical Muslims Hate You” to discover historical, socio-cultural, political, religious, and psychological roots of such anger. It helped me to connect with Muslims who shared similar concerns but disavowed the radical methods.

Dust of Death

Deborah’s experience as a corporate chaplain took her back to New York to help WTC-based companies and their employees who suffered loss on 9/11 cope with the emotional and spiritual whirlwinds their worlds had become. Many suffered from survivor guilt. Failure to process grief could lead to serious consequences. Some firemen, for instance, were assigned to look after widows of fallen comrades. “There can be enormous intimacy and bonding in shared grief,” Deborah notes. “Some of the firemen and widows ended up in bed together.”

Some competitive, driven businesspersons re-examined their rat race—making big bucks and accumulating the most toys—and asked, “Is that all there is?”. Long looks at corporate culture prompted many to consider spiritual realities.

Part of helping survivors process their experiences involved taking them to Ground Zero. Deborah comments, “As I stood at Ground Zero and picked up the dust, I could not help but think that we were standing in a giant crematorium. The ground seemed hallowed to me.”

Personal Lessons from 9/11

What personal 9/11 lessons persist? Perhaps you can relate to these that seem poignant to me:

We live in a contingent universe. Human decisions and actions have consequences, often for good or evil.

Life is temporary. One early spiritual leader wrote of our lives' fleeting nature, "You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."{3}

Link with the eternal. Jesus of Nazareth, whom people of diverse spiritual persuasions respect as a great teacher, told a friend grieving her brother's death, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish."{4}

Cherish your friends. In the aftermath of 9/11, many friendships were deepened as people linked with each other for encouragement, solace and support.

Understand and love your enemies and intellectual adversaries. Support national defense, but learning about state enemies can help communication with moderates who share some of their convictions. Getting to know neighbors or associates with whom you differ politically, philosophically or spiritually can help build bridges that foster civility in public discourse.

Notes

1. Amy Westfeldt, "Study: Sept. 11 Survivors Still Grieving," Associated Press, May 26, 2006, on AOL News. Also see full Red Cross report, http://www.redcross.org/images/pdfs/SRPClientSurvey.pdf, p. v.

2. Matthew 5:44 NASB.

3. James 4:14 NASB.

4. John 11:25 NLT.

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“Why Can’t God and Satan Settle Their Differences?”

Why do not all the religions of the world pray to God asking him and the Devil to get together and settle their differences? It is widely held that God answers prayers.

This type of praying would surely head the list of really important things to pray for. I believe it is written at one time God and the Devil were very good friends existing in Heaven together. I also believe it is written while they were living together they had a big argument. The devil lost, and was tossed out. Would not the World be a better place if they improve their relationship?

I am thinking of all the people killed during the Crusades, the 30 years war, the Holocaust, the Civil War, the list is endless. I am also thinking about future babies, who will be born in the future, with their souls, not subject to future damnation. At least their chances would be better.

I believe God has written “blessed are the peacemakers.” Would it be too much to ask for this? I have seen no answer to this question, your answer would be appreciated.

Interesting question!

I don’t think it would do any good to pray that God and Satan get together to settle their differences for several reasons:

1. God is 100% good; Satan is 100% evil. Good and evil cannot peacefully co-exist, because good will eventually destroy evil.

2. We need to read the Bible as our only resource on what is true in the spirit realm because God gave us this information (as revelation). From what we can gather of what the Bible says about angels and demons, these powerful spirit beings do not have the capacity to repent as we humans do. They don't even understand what it is like to be forgiven and accepted back into friendship with God. Thus, to ask for Satan and the demons to change is like praying that black become white or negative become positive. It won't happen.

3. God already knows what the future holds, and He has told us a certain amount of that information. He has declared that at the end of time, He will throw Satan and the demons into a lake of fire for all eternity. What God has declared and has recorded in scripture will not change because God already knows what He will do.

God cannot improve his relationship with Satan because Satan cannot and will not become other than what he is. And just as the nature of sunlight is to destroy mold, and the nature of boiling water is to destroy harmful bacteria, the nature of God's holiness is to destroy rebellion and sin. They cannot be reconciled.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

“How Do You Answer the Claim That Jesus Was 100% Man Emptying Himself of God?”

I recently heard a pastor speak about some things that really bothered me. First, he said that Jesus was 100 percent man that emptied himself of God. He said that the miracle of God becoming man would not be taken away if you do not believe this. His term was, “Jesus was 100% man that was God.” He also threw in the comment that Jesus and the Father are one, not as in the Trinity but that Jesus was God and for instance in the garden when He was praying, He was praying to Himself. He also believed that in the temple when Jesus was young, when it says he grew in wisdom and stature that means he was learning, hence that he did not know everything.

Secondly—he does not believe that the serpent in the garden was Satan. He actually seemed that he didn’t believe that there is a Satan. He used the meaning of Satan as tempter and not an actual creature. This has really been bothering me and I would like your answers and some advice in where to study this myself.

Thanks for your letter. It sounds like you have some good reasons to be concerned about the pastor. The orthodox doctrine of Christ holds that Jesus was fully God and fully man. He was not a man who “emptied Himself” of God, for in that case He would no longer be divine. What Philippians 2:5-11 rather tells us, I think, is that He “emptied Himself” by becoming human and temporarily (and voluntarily) giving up the independent exercise of His divine attributes. Jesus was fully God, but He voluntarily submitted, for a limited time, to a limitation in the independent exercise of His divine attributes (e.g. omniscience, omnipresence, etc.). Jesus could still exercise these attributes, but only insofar as it was

consistent with the Father's will during His earthly sojourn. This, I think, is a better explanation of Philippians 2:5-11.

A good analogy is to imagine the world's fastest sprinter running in a three-legged race. He would voluntarily restrict and limit himself for a time, but even while running much more slowly than he was capable of, he never stops being the world's fastest sprinter. Jesus never stopped being divine even while He voluntarily limited Himself concerning His omniscience, His omnipresence, His omnipotence, etc.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to the Father. Christian orthodoxy believes in the Trinity. God is one in essence, but subsists as three distinct Persons. The Father is not the Son and neither are the Holy Spirit. Rather, each is a distinct Person, but all share mysteriously in the One divine essence. This pastor sounds like he rejects Trinitarianism, or holds to some form of what is known as "modalism." Some people have described modalism as "the swapping hats" theory: God swaps out the Father hat for the Son hat or the Holy Spirit hat, depending on who He wants to "be" at any given moment. According to orthodox Christianity, rejecting the Trinity or embracing modalism are heretical viewpoints.

Your pastor is correct, however, to say that Jesus grew in knowledge. But He did so as a human being. As God, He is all-knowing. However, as I said above, in the incarnation Jesus voluntarily surrendered the independent exercise of His divine attributes. Jesus Himself confessed that there were some things that He did not know during His time on earth; see Mark 13:32; etc.

Finally, while it is certainly true that Genesis 3 does not identify the serpent with Satan, this identification does seem to be made explicitly in Revelation 12:9. Also, a careful study of what the Bible teaches about Satan reveals that personal attributes are consistently applied to him. The Bible views Satan as a personal being, not as a metaphor for

temptation, etc.

Hope this helps a bit. If you would like more information about biblical and theological issues, please visit The Biblical Studies Foundation website at Netbible.org. They have lots of great information about the Bible.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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"Who Controls the World—God or Satan?"

A friend and I were discussing whose rule the world was under, God's or Satan's. Of course we disagreed because I said God ruled the world and allows Satan to take us through suffering to make us strong and to test our faith. My friend feels that the world belongs to Satan because Eve succumbed to Satan in the Garden of Eden. Please clarify who controls the world today.

Thanks for your letter. Satan has been temporarily granted a tremendous amount of power over this world, as can be seen from the following passages:

> *John 12:31 – Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*
>
> *2 Cor 4:4 – …in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the*

> *light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*
>
> *1 John 5:19 – We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*

But God is the One who ultimately rules and reigns over all things. He is the Creator of all that exists (other than Himself of course) and all things are ultimately subject to His will and power. Many passages of Scripture bear this out – e.g. Psalms 9:7; 22:28; 47:8; 59:13; 66:7; 97:1; 99:1; 103:19; 146:10, as well as passages such as Gen. 1-2; Job 1-2; John 1; Eph. 1; Col. 1; Rom. 9-11; Rev. 19-22; etc.

Satan is a creature; God is his Creator. Satan cannot do anything that the Lord does not permit him to do (see Job 1-2) and God will one day cast Satan into the lake of fire for all eternity (Rev. 20:10).

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

What's the Meaning of Life?

Former Probe staffer Jerry Solomon explains how Christianity answers the biggest question of them all: What is the meaning of life?

Cathy has been married to her husband Dan for twenty years and is the mother of two teenagers. She is very involved in family, church, and community activities. Many consider her to be the model of one that "has it together," so to speak.

Unknown to her family and her many friends, lately she has been thinking a lot about her lifestyle. As a result, she has even questioned whether there is any ultimate meaning or purpose underlying her busyness. At lunch one day she finds herself in an intimate conversation with a good friend named Sarah. Even though they have never talked about such things, Cathy decides to see how Sarah will respond to her questioning. Lets eavesdrop on their conversation.

Cathy: Sarah, I've been doing some serious thinking lately.

Sarah: Is something wrong?

Cathy: I don't know that I would say something is wrong. I just don't know what to make of these thoughts I've been having.

Sarah: What thoughts?

Cathy: This may sound like Im going off the deep end or something, but I promise you Im not. Ive just started asking some really heavy questions. And I haven't told another soul about it.

Sarah: Well, tell me! You know you can trust me.

Cathy: Okay. But you promise not to laugh or blow it off?

Sarah: Stop being so defensive. Just say it!

Cathy: Sarah, why are you here? I mean, what is your purpose in life?

Sarah: (She pauses before responding flippantly.) You're right, you *have* gone off the deep end.

Cathy: Sarah, I need you to be serious with me here!

Sarah: Okay! I'm sorry! I'm just drawing a blank. Actually, I try *not* to think about that question.

Cathy: Yeah, well, denying it doesn't work anymore. It just keeps rolling around in my head.

Sarah: Cant you talk to Dan about it?

Cathy: I've thought about it, but I don't want him to think there's something wrong between *us.*

Sarah: Well, what about talking to your pastor? I bet he'd have some answers.

Cathy: Yeah, I've thought about that too. Maybe I will.

Is Cathy really "weird," or is she an example of people that rub shoulders with us each day? And what about Sarah? Was her nervous response typical of how most of us would respond if we were asked questions about meaning and purpose?

James Dobson relates an intriguing story about a remarkable seventeen-year-old girl who achieved a perfect score on both sections of the "Scholastic Achievement Test, and a perfect on the tough University of California acceptance index. Never in history has anyone accomplished this intellectual feat, which is almost staggering to contemplate."{1} Interestingly, though, when a reporter "asked her, What is the meaning of life? she replied, I have no idea. I would like to know myself."{2}

This intellectually brilliant young lady has something in common with Cathy and Sarah, doesn't she? She is able to understand complicated subject matter, but she has no idea if life has any meaning.

Our goal in this essay is to see if there is an answer for them, as well as all of us.

The Questions Around Us

As I was driving to my office one day I heard a dramatic radio advertisement for a book. It began something like this: "Would

you like to find meaning in life?" As I listened to the remainder of the ad I realized that the books author was focusing on New Age concepts of purpose and meaning. But the striking thing about what was said was that the advertisers obviously believed that they could get the attention of the radio audience by asking about meaning in life. Some may think it is advertising suicide to open an ad with such a question. Or perhaps the author and her publicists are on to something that "strikes a chord" with many people in our culture.

Questions of meaning and purpose are a part of the mental landscape as we enter a new millennium. Some contend this has not always been the case, but that such questions are an unprecedented legacy of the upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.{3} Others assert that such questions are a result of mans rejection of God.{4}

Even though most of us don't make such issues a part of our normal conversations, the questions tend to lurk around us. They can be heard in songs, movies, books, magazines, and many other media that permeate our lives. For example, Jackson Browne, an exceptionally reflective songwriter of the 60s and 70s, wrote these haunting lyrics in a song entitled *For a Dancer*:

> Into a dancer you have grown
> From a seed somebody else has thrown
> Go ahead and throw
> Some seeds of your own
> And somewhere between the time you arrive
> And the time you go
> May lie a reason you were alive….{5}

Russell Banks, the author of *Affliction* and *The Sweet Hereafter*, both of which became Oscar-nominated films, has this to say about his work: "I'm not a morbid man. In my writing, I'm just trying to describe the world as straightforwardly as I can. I think most lives are desperate

and painful, despite surface appearances. If you consider anyone's life for long, you find its without meaning."{6}

Woody Allen, the film writer, director, and actor, has consistently populated his scripts with characters who exchange dialogue concerning meaning and purpose. In *Hannah and Her Sisters* a character named Mickey says, "Do you realize what a thread were all hanging by? Can you understand how meaningless everything is? Everything. I gotta get some answers."{7}

Even television ads have focused on meaning, although in a flippant manner. A few years ago you could watch Michael Jordan running across hills and valleys in order to find a guru. When Jordan finds him he asks, "What is the meaning of life?" The guru answers with a maxim that leads to the product that is the real focus of Jordan's quest.

Even though such illustrations can be ridiculous, maybe they serve to lead us beyond the surface of our subject. We often get nervous when we are encouraged to delve into subject matter that might stretch us. When we get involved in conversations that go beyond the more mundane things of everyday life we may tend to get tense and defensive. Actually, this can be a good thing. The Christian shouldn't fear such conversations. Indeed, I'm confident that if we go beyond the surface, we can find peace and hope.

Beyond the Surface

Listen to the sober words of a famous writer of the twentieth century:

> There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy…. I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting

> killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions.{8}

These phrases indicate that Albert Camus, author of *The Plague, The Stranger,* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, was not afraid to go beyond the surface. Camus was bold in exposing the thoughts many were having during his lifetime. In fact, his world view made it obligatory. He was struggling with questions of meaning in light of what some called the "death of God." That is, if there is no God, can we find meaning? Many have concluded that the answer is a resounding "No!" If true, this means that one who believes there is no God is not living consistently with that belief.

William Lane Craig, one of the great Christian thinkers of our time, states that:

> Man cannot live consistently and happily as though life were ultimately without meaning, value or purpose. If we try to live consistently within the atheistic worldview, we shall find ourselves profoundly unhappy. If instead we manage to live happily, it is only by giving the lie to our worldview.{9}

Francis Schaeffer agrees with ' analysis, but makes even bolder assertions. He also maintains that the Christian can close the hopeless gap that is created in a persons godless worldview. Listen to what he wrote:

> It is impossible for any non-Christian individual or group to be consistent to their system in logic or in practice. Thus, when you face twentieth-century man, whether he is brilliant or an ordinary man of the street, a man of the university or the docks, you are facing a man in tension; and it is this tension which works on your behalf as you speak to him.{10}

What happens when we go “beyond the surface” in order to find meaning? Can a Christian worldview stand up to the challenge? I believe it can, but we must stop and think of whether we are willing to accept the challenge. David Henderson, a pastor and writer, gives us reason to pause and consider our response. He writes:

> Our lives, like our Daytimers, are busy, busy, busy, full of things to do and places to go and people to see. Many of us, convinced that the opposite of an empty life is a full schedule, remain content to press on and ignore the deeper questions. Perhaps it is out of fear that we stuff our lives to the walls—fear that, were we to stop and ask the big questions, we would discover there are no satisfying answers after all.{11}

Let’s jettison any fear and continue our investigation. There are satisfying answers. It is not necessary to “stuff our lives to the walls” in order to escape questions of meaning and purpose. God has spoken to us. Let us begin to pursue His answers.

Eternity in Our Hearts

The book of Ecclesiastes contains numerous phrases that have entered our discourse. One of those phrases states that God “has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart. . .” (3:11). What a fascinating statement! Actually, the first part of the verse can be just as accurately translated “beautiful in its time.” Thus “a harmony of purpose and a beneficial supremacy of control pervade all issues of life to such an extent that they rightly challenge our admiration.”{12} The second part of the verse indicates that “man has a deep-seated sense of eternity, of purposes and destinies.”{13}But man can’t fathom the vastness of eternal things, even when he believes in the God of eternity. As a result, all people live with what some call a “God-shaped hole.” Stephen Evans believes this hole can be

understood through "the desire for eternal life, the desire for eternal meaning, and the desire for eternal love:"{14}

> The desire for *eternal life* is the most evident manifestation of the need for God. Deep in our hearts we feel death should not be, was not meant to be. The second dimension of our craving for eternity is the desire for *eternal meaning*. We want lives that are eternally meaningful. We crave eternity, and earthly loves resemble eternity enough to kindle our deepest love. Yet earthly loves are not eternal. Our sense that love is the clue to what its all about is right on target, but earthly love itself merely points us in the right direction. What we want is an *eternal love*, a love that loves us unconditionally, accepts us as we are, while helping us to become all we can become. In short, we want *God*, the God of Christian faith.{15}
>
> We must trust God for what we cannot see and understand. Or, to put it another way, we continue to live knowing there is meaning, but we struggle to know exactly what it is at all times. We are striving for what the Bible refers to as our future glorification (Rom. 8:30). "There is something self-defeating about human desire, in that what is desired, when achieved, seems to leave the desire unsatisfied."{16} For example, we attempt to find meaning while searching for what is beautiful. C.S. Lewis referred to this in a sermon entitled *The Weight of Glory*:
>
> The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news

from a country we have not visited.{17}

Lewis's remarkable prose reminds us that meaning must be *given* to us. "Meaning is never intrinsic; it is always derivative. If my life itself is to have meaning (or *a* meaning), it thus must derive its meaning from some sort of purposive, intentional activity. It must be endowed with meaning."{18} Thus we return to God, the giver of meaning.

Meaning: Gods Gift

Think of all the wonderful gifts that God has given you. No doubt you can come up with a lengthy record of God's goodness. Does your list include meaning or purpose in life? Most people wouldn't think of meaning as part of Gods goodness to us. But perhaps we should. This is because "only a being like God—a creator of all who could eventually, in the words of the New Testament, work all things together for good—only this sort of being could guarantee a completeness and permanency of meaning for human lives."{19}So how did God accomplish this? The answer rests in His amazing love for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Consider the profound words of Carl F.H. Henry: "the eternal and self-revealed Logos, incarnate in Jesus Christ, is the foundation of all meaning."{20} Bruce Lockerbie puts it like this: "The divine nature manifesting itself in the physical form of Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the integrating principle to which all life adheres, the focal point from which all being takes its meaning, the source of all coherence in the universe. Around him and him alone all else may be said to radiate. He is the Cosmic Center."{21}

Picture a bicycle. When you ride one you are putting your weight on a multitude of spokes that radiate from a hub. All the spokes meet at the center and rotate around it. The bicycle moves based upon the center. Thus it is with Christ. He is the center around whom we move and find meaning. Our

focus is on Him.

When the apostle Paul reflected on meaning and purpose in his life in Philippians 3, he came to this conclusion (emphases added):

> 7…whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value *of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order *that I may gain Christ,* 9 *and may be found in Him,* not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 *that I may know Him,* and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order *that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Did you notice how Christ was central to what Paul had to say about both his past and present? And did you notice that he used phrases such as "knowing Christ," or "that I may gain Christ?" Such statements appear to be crucial to Paul's sense of meaning and purpose. Paul wants "to know" Christ intimately, which means he wants to know by experience. "Paul wants to come to know the Lord Jesus in that fulness of experimental knowledge which is only wrought by being like Him."{22}

Personally, Paul's thoughts are important words of encouragement in my life. God through Christ gives meaning and purpose to me. And until I am glorified, I will strive to know Him and be like Him. Praise God for Jesus Christ, His gift of meaning!

Notes

1. James Dobson, *Focus on the Family* Newsletter (May 1996).

2. Ibid.
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4. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985).
5. Jackson Browne, "For a Dancer," in James F. Harris, *Philosophy at 33*
1/3 rpm: Themes of Classic Rock Music (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), 68.
6. Russell Banks, in Jerome Weeks, "Continental Divide," *The Dallas Morning News* (2 March 1999), 2C.
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10. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968), 122.
11. David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 186.
12. H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1952), 90.
13. Ibid., 91.
14. C. Stephen Evans, *Why Believe? Reason and Mystery as Pointers to God*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 58-60.
15. Ibid.
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18. Morris, 57.
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21. D. Bruce Lockerbie, *The Cosmic Center: The Supremacy of Christ in a Secular Wasteland* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1986),127-128.
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"Help Me Know That God is Really There"

I read your article Evidence for God's Existence. I have always believed in God until recently when I read some articles by James Randi known to most people as "The Amazing Randi." He seems to be able to disprove the divine power of people who claim to be able to talk to the dead and move objects with their minds with scientific proof that they are merely just cheap parlor tricks. I believe he is correct not only because he says so but because the bible tells us that Jesus was the last person on earth who could do such things as tell the future or perform miracles etc. But what if Jesus knew these parlor tricks which are as old as the hills? I saw Siegfried and Roy make an elephant disappear right before my very eyes in front of a thousand people and admit to trickery. Who is to say that Jesus didn't know how to fool the average person in the same way thousands of years ago? Please understand that I am not being a wise guy. I truly have issues with this because I was such a firm believer in God and Jesus Christ. If God doesn't exist, then I am truly alone and have wasted many hours and prayers on things that would or wouldn't

happen anyway with or without my prayers.

Also, I have been talking to myself all these years and I must be crazy. I realize the consequences of my decision not to believe in God if I am wrong. Somehow that seems trivial while I am still alive. I still go to church every Sunday with my wife. I don't let on that my faith has been diminished because my wife is such a good God-fearing woman and I don't want to impose my beliefs on her or anyone else. Especially if I am wrong. What it boils down to is if science can prove that the existence of God is only something that exists in my mind, and the voice I hear inside myself is my own self, then I am guilty of being a fool. For he who teaches himself has a fool for a master. True the earth is a miracle in itself and surely no parlor trick. I can't explain how it all began if there is no God. But we as just mankind can't even begin to explain any theory with our limited knowledge of the universe. If Siegfried and Roy can make an elephant disappear in front of all those people and admit it is a trick, yet nobody can figure out how it was done, than it is understandable that the beginning of the world which must be a far greater "trick" and is something that we as ordinary individuals can never figure out. Bad things happen in this world that I feel shouldn't. I love my family and my pets. I don't want to see them die. But they must die just as I must die. What if there isn't anything after death and you just lie there in the ground. That beautiful gift of life has been destroyed. I can't accept that a loving God would take these things away from me or anyone who hold them so near and dear to their heart. Could it be that God is for the weak minded who need direction and discipline to get through life without going off course for their own good? Is life just a crap shoot anyway where what ever happens, happens whether you pray or not? Please forgive me if I have offended you with my talk of disbelief but I thought if anyone could answer my questions, you could. I don't mean any disrespect. I need to know that God is really there to hear my prayers and help me to make decisions. I need

to know that I am not on my own in this world and my prayers are heard and answered according to his word not just my imagination or wishful thinking.

Dear _____,

Bless your heart! Thank you you SO MUCH for sharing your deep thoughts and fears with me. I have two things to say in response.

1. The best thing Jesus ever did to prove that what He did was true miracles and not tricks was to rise from the dead. How do you counterfeit THAT? The resurrection is the strongest evidence for the truth of Christianity that we have. Consider that the disciples, who had been so disheartened by His death (even though He had promised several times to rise from the dead), were so turned around by seeing Him alive again that they changed the world and were willing to die for their belief in a risen Savior. If it were only a trick, no one would have died for a lie. May I suggest you get a hold of Lee Strobel's book *The Case for Christ* and shore up your faith? I think that book will really help. (Consider also other people—like Strobel the former skeptic—who set out to prove the resurrection false, like Frank Morison, and were so overwhelmed by the evidence that they became believers and wrote books like *Who Moved the Stone?*)

2. I believe that the doubts that assail you are nothing more than spiritual warfare. I think you are being attacked by the spiritual forces of darkness, and I gently suggest you read Ephesians 6 and put on the armor of faith to fight these horrible attacks. I have also been impressed by Kay Arthur's book *Lord, Is It Warfare?* to help deal with spiritual warfare in the form of attacking doubts.

_____, I am completely convinced that this period of doubts in your life is like being outside on a bright sunny day when the sun disappears because it is obscured by a cloud. . .

temporarily. You are not alone—you would not BELIEVE how many e-mails I get just like yours. You have put your faith in an eternal truth, not in lie. I promise.

Cheerily in Jesus,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"How Could a Compassionate God Order the Genocide of the Canaanites?"

My eldest daughter and I have been discussing portions of the Bible with which she is struggling. One of the problem passages she asked about is "Why does God order the genocide of the Canaanites?" Now of course I can give her the answer in the Bible, i.e., that God gave them 400 years to repent and that their sins were horrible, etc.; but her real question is ethical. How can God who has such compassion for the innocents in Ninevah order the wholesale killing of innocent children in Palestine? Is the God of the OT and the God of the NT the same Person? How can I reconcile these, in modern terms, "unthinkable" crimes against humanity with the God of compassion revealed by Jesus?

We're also looking for good articles regarding "why I can trust the Bible" and the "relevance of the Bible" for today.

Thanks for your help.

Great questions!

We need to revisit the assessment of the Canaanites as "innocent." From God's perspective, there is no such thing as an innocent human being (apart from Jesus Christ). Every human heart is evil and bent on sin and rebellion. I see a strong parallel between God's actions against the Canaanites and the actions of an oncology surgeon. He has to cut out what may appear to be healthy tissue but which is actually infected with cancer cells. The Canaanites were infected with sin. I don't understand about the children, but I do know that a compassionate God ordered it. Something to consider, then, is the question of "Do children go to hell?" Probe's founder, Jimmy Williams, addresses this issue here.

Yes, the God of the New Testament is the same as the God of the Old Testament, a God of love and grace. Evidence of His love and grace are rampant throughout both testaments. I think we need to cultivate a spirit of humility before an infinite God we cannot fully understand because "all the available facts are not all the facts." God never committed any crimes against humanity, much less unthinkable ones, because we cannot see ourselves, or Him, accurately. We have to depend on God's revelation of human nature—which is that, apart from God, we are wicked and rebellious and evil, even at the same time that we are His image-bearers. And on His revelation of His own nature—which is that He is holy and just, and He would have been completely within His rights to allow every single human being to go to hell because that is what we deserve. But He didn't.

I'm afraid there is no "silver bullet" answer to these questions, _____, because we don't have all the facts and just have to trust that God is good all the time, and He knows things we don't. Along these lines, may I also suggest you read the article "I Can't Forgive God for Taking All Those People in the WTC!".

My colleague Rick Wade goes into great detail on this question in these two articles:

God and the Canaanites
Yahweh War and the Conquest of Canaan

Probe's founder, Jimmy Williams, explores the question here:

"How Can a Just God Order the Slaughter of Men, Women and Children?"

Concerning your question about apologetics articles, we have:
Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?
Authority of the Bible
The Christian Canon
Archaeology and the Old Testament
Archaeology and the New Testament

The Relevance of Christianity: An Apologetic

You might also find it helpful to browse our Theology/Apologetics Topics pages.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can't Change

Sue Bohlin presents her personal testimony of how Christ led her to a biblical worldview understanding of her physical state. She explains how understanding her situation ministered to her and others spiritually and emotionally.

The most unique and distinctive thing about me is something I absolutely HATED when I was growing up. I'm one of the last

polio babies. I got polio when I was eight months old, in October of 1953, just a few months before the vaccine was developed. My left leg was paralyzed from the hip down, but a couple days after I got sick with polio, some limited use started to return to my virtually dead leg.

Polio left me with one leg shorter than the other, one foot smaller than the other, weakened muscles, and a serious limp. I had several orthopedic surgeries and went to physical therapy once a week. Every day until I was 14, I did exercises with a weighted boot strapped onto my shoe. I would cry, "But I don't *want* to do my exercises!!!" and my mother would insist, "But you *have* to do your exercises!!!" Before I learned to walk, I was fitted with a full-length steel and leather brace. I was so glad when the movie *Forrest Gump* came out, because my kids were able to see what braces looked like, since they never knew that part of my life!

Polio profoundly affected my body, but it only crippled my body a little compared to what it did to my self image. I hated the way I looked. I hated what the polio had done to me, and I despaired every time I looked in the mirror, thinking, "Ugly! You are so UGLY!!"

So I got good at two things. One was repressing the polio altogether. I got in the habit, which I actually have to this day, of avoiding looking in mirrors, or seeing my reflection in store windows, or even acknowledging my shadow. I don't want to see the way I walk, because it hurts to see the way I walk. I consider myself an expert on denial; in fact, one of these days I have to get that T-shirt that says, "Call me Cleopatra—Queen of Denial!"

The other thing I got good at was a very special fantasy. It was so private, so personal, that I never even wrote it down. I loved to fantasize that when I grew up, I would become a princess, and my polio troubles would be behind me because those sorts of things don't bother princesses! Now, the

chances of a vacuum cleaner salesman's daughter from Highland Park, Illinois, becoming a princess are mighty slim, but I loved my fantasy.

In high school, the polio got in the way of dating. No one seemed able to just accept *me* as someone worth going out with. I had friends who were boys, but hardly anyone was interested in anything more than friendship. My sixteenth birthday was bittersweet because I was "sweet sixteen and never been kissed." High school boys then, like now, weren't exactly paragons of sensitivity and acceptance! My self-esteem dropped even lower.

I went to college at the University of Illinois to work on a degree in Elementary Education. One day in my sophomore year, something happened that changed the entire course of my life.

A friend was handing out flyers inviting students to see that evening's performance of an illusionist-magician. I thought, "Great! I love magic!" I love to see women get sawn in two, and the fake levitating, and all that David Copperfield sort of stuff, and I started to get excited about it. But then I noticed the small letters at the bottom of the flyer: this performance was sponsored by a campus religious organization. "Forget it," I thought. "I am NOT interested in Jesus freaks." But as the day wore on, I felt like a huge magnet was pulling me to the performance, and I found myself buying a ticket and planning on going. I'm so glad I did.

The illusionist, Andre Kole with Campus Crusade for Christ, was excellent. But I don't remember his magic nearly as much as I remember his message. For one thing, he stopped halfway through the evening and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we're going to take a short intermission. After the break I'm going to use my illusion to illustrate some spiritual principles. If this will offend you, I want to give you an opportunity to leave during the intermission." I thought, "What in the world is this guy going to say?" Besides, I had spent one whole

dollar on my ticket and I was going to get my money's worth!

When he started again, he said some things I'd never heard before, but which were quite intriguing. He quoted a famous philosopher who said that we each have a God-shaped vacuum within us, and nothing will fit that shape or fill that emptiness except for God Himself. He quoted someone else who had said that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. He pointed out that there's a huge difference between Christianity and "Churchianity." Churchianity, he said, is man trying to earn favor with God, trying to work his way to heaven. But Christianity as the Bible explains it is a relationship. It's God reaching down to man and calling us into an intimate friendship with Himself, not because of anything we deserve or anything we can do to please Him, but because He desires to have a relationship with us.

Andre Kole really got my attention when he asked, "Do you know what a Christian really is?" I thought, "Of course I do! A Christian is someone who isn't Jewish!" But he said that according to the Bible, Christian means "Christ-in-one," and that a true Christian is actually indwelled by Jesus Christ Himself. That blew me away.

Then he said, "I'm going to use my illusion to illustrate some points. Just as there are physical laws that govern the physical universe, so there are spiritual laws that govern the spiritual universe.

The Four Spiritual Laws

"The first law is that God loves you and He offers a wonderful plan for your life. When Jesus was on earth, He said, 'I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.' Now what do you suppose He meant by 'abundant life'? I think He meant a life filled with purpose and joy and direction and fulfillment. But as you look around the world today, you see that, obviously, most people are not living that kind of life.

Something is terribly wrong.

“That brings us to the second spiritual law: Man is sinful and separated from God. We don’t like to use the word ‘sin’ today, but it’s a word the Bible uses a lot. It’s actually an archery term, and it means missing the mark or the target. It doesn’t matter if you miss the target by one inch or one mile, you’re still missing it. God commands us to be holy and perfect, just as He is holy and perfect. But we don’t even meet our *own* standards, much less God’s!

“The Bible also tells us that ‘the wages of sin is death.’ That means that the penalty for missing the mark of being absolutely perfect and holy is death—not only the physical death of our bodies, but that when we die, we can’t ever be with God in heaven. It means the death of our spirits as well. And once we commit one sin, there’s nothing we can do to restore ourselves. We’re stuck. There’s a huge chasm between us and God, and there’s nothing we can do to cross it.

“That’s where the really good news comes in. The third spiritual law is that God has provided a solution to this dilemma. Since the Bible says that the punishment for sin is death, someone has to die because of our sin. God didn’t want us to have to pay that penalty, so He sent His own Son, Jesus, from heaven to earth. He took on human flesh—that’s what Christmas is about—and lived a perfect life. Then He died a heinous death on a cross, even though He was innocent, and He died in our place. Three days later, God raised Him from the dead because He was pleased with Jesus’ sacrifice.”

Now, I had heard a lot of this stuff before when I was growing up in church, but it had never had any impact on me. I knew a lot of religious facts, but they didn’t affect my life in any way. I believed that George Washington was the Father of our Country, I believed that Abraham Lincoln was the best president (I was from Illinois, remember. . .”the Land of Lincoln”!), and I believed that Jesus Christ died for the sins

of the world. They were all in the same category in my head, and they all had the same affect on me– which is to say, none at all.

But I had never, ever heard what he said next, the fourth spiritual law. "Each of us must accept Christ's gift of eternal life *personally*." He explained that Jesus was offering each of us the gift of eternal life, which means not only going to heaven when we die but, starting that moment, He would live His powerful, holy, beautiful life from INSIDE US. Whoa!! This was a *totally* new concept!! I thought that God stayed in His corner of the universe, and I limped along in my little corner, and never the twain shall meet. But suddenly I was hearing something completely new and different–that God Himself loved me so much He wanted to come live IN MY HEART!!!! As I sat there, reveling in this new information and this incredible offer, I saw that all along, I had thought I was doing all right with God because I was basically a "good girl." But now I realized that I was missing the boat entirely, because I had never entered into a personal relationship with God at all; I had been caught up in rules and rituals and traditions, and had rejected them all because they had no meaning to me. And here was God offering me HIMSELF instead of those dead rules and rituals and traditions!

My whole spirit cried out in one big "YES!!!!!" It felt rather like a flower turning to the sun and bursting forth in full blossom. Andre Kole prayed a short prayer, which I followed along in my heart, but my real prayer consisted of one incredibly joyful "YES!!!"

I went home to my dorm, where I told my roommates, "Guess what? When I left tonight, we were in a triple, but now we're in a quadruple, because Jesus is now living in my heart!" They just groaned, "OH NO!! You got RELIGION!!" They dismissed what I was saying: "We know what this means, Sue. There's a guy involved in this somewhere. We know how you work. Every two

weeks or so you fall in love with somebody new, and whatever the guy believes, that's your new philosophy. Last month you were in love with Tony Hunter, and you thought you were Jonathan Livingston Seagull! So this is nothing more than a fad, and it will pass when THIS guy doesn't work out either."

So my roommates waited for the fad to pass. That was 1973.

Just a fad? No way!

It wasn't a fad, and it didn't pass, because my new relationship with Jesus Christ was the most real thing that had ever happened to me. My life became a perpetual surprise box. No one warned me that when God came to live inside me, He'd be making all sorts of wonderful changes! They just started happening.

For one thing, my language cleared up. When I was still at home, I was a "good girl." But when I went to college, my crippled self- esteem made me crave the acceptance of my friends. And since they all had mouths like sailors, I started talking like that too. I was never really comfortable with it (because princesses don't swear!). But within about two weeks of the night I trusted Christ, I realized that it was as if God reached down into my vocabulary box with a great big soapy sponge and cleaned out all the garbage that was in there—without asking Him to!

I discovered that, for the first time in my life, I wanted to go to church. The friend who had invited me to the Andre Kole show also invited me to his church, which was a block from my dorm but somehow I had never noticed it. I didn't even own a dress, but I got one, and went to church of my own free will for the first time in my life. I made a startling discovery. The church was filled with college students who were there because they WANTED to be, not because their parents had made them go! From the very first time I went, I was captivated by the lights on in everyone's eyes. These people were honestly

joyful and so glad to be there! Not only that, but they sang all the verses of the hymns, with enthusiasm! This was a *whole* new experience for me. Then, the pastor got up and taught us from the Bible, relating it to our 20th-century lives. I loved it!

And the third thing that happened was a new hunger to read the Bible. I didn't own one of those, either. I had tried it a couple of times; when I was in elementary school, a priest had told us one day that if we wanted to read a love letter from God, to go home and look in our family Bible and read the epistles. So I tried it. Didn't look like any love letter *I* wanted to read! It was too hard to understand, and seemed so dull and boring, I shut the dusty book and put it back on the shelf. Another time, another priest told us that if we wanted to see how the end of the world would happen, to read the last book of the Bible. What a disaster *that* was! But now I really wanted to read and understand the Bible, so I went to the college bookstore and found the Living Bible, a modern-day paraphrase that I could easily understand. In the first few pages, I found just what I needed: "If you're new to this book…" It gave a suggested order for reading certain books, and I knew I had the help I needed. I couldn't wait for 4 o'clock every day, when I could go back to my dorm room and read about Jesus, this new, wonderful Friend who was now living in my heart.

But it wasn't the immediate changes that I want to talk about. Far more important are the long-term changes that God has been working in my life, healing my self-image and helping me deal with the polio.

Healing a Crippled Self-Image

The more I read and studied the Bible, the more I learned to see myself as God said I was, and realized that what He said was so much more accurate and trustworthy than how I felt. I'm a woman, and the way I felt about myself completely depended

on external things like whether my hair was clean, whether I was wearing make- up, and the time of the month. So I could wake up, force myself to look in the mirror, and whimper in defeat—then, 30 minutes later, not be so depressed once I'd had a chance to do something about myself. But as I learned to embrace the truth about what God said I was, that it was more valid than my fleeting feelings, it profoundly changed the way I felt about myself.

When I studied Genesis, the first book of the Bible that explains the beginnings of everything, I learned that when God made Adam and Eve in His image, that made them infinitely valuable—not because of themselves, but because of their Creator. And, because I'm descended from Adam and Eve, I learned that I was also made in the image of God, and that makes me infinitely valuable as well. But this was a truth I only learned in my head; I didn't learn it in my heart until my first son was born.

The whole time I was pregnant with Curt, I prided myself on being a thoroughly modern, non-emotional mother. I knew that newborn human babies weren't particularly beautiful, as compared to, say, newborn lambs. When I saw my baby, I was going to say, "Yes, that's a baby all right. Take him and clean him up, and when you bring him back we'll bond."

And then Curt was actually born.

When I first laid eyes on this child who was made in my husband's and my image, this child that God had made by taking Ray's intangible love for me and my intangible love for him and creating a tangible baby that we could hold and love, I thought, "WHOA! This is THE most BEAUTIFUL baby the world has ever seen!" I instantly fell in love with this little bundle of baby, and he was infinitely valuable to me, NOT because of anything intrinsic with him—I mean, all babies do is eat and sleep and poop and cry—but because he was made in our image.

A few days later, in the hospital, I had him on my lap doing a finger and toe check, and just sort of smelling his awesome newborn-baby smell, when I suddenly realized with a rush of mother- tiger protective love, that IF ANYONE SO MUCH AS LAID A HAND ON THIS CHILD, I WOULD PERSONALLY TEAR THEM LIMB FROM LIMB!!!! I didn't know I could love anyone that much, but I loved my baby with a ferocious, passionate love that surprised and overwhelmed me. (Okay, okay, I realized this was probably hormones, but it sure felt real enough at the time!) Then, as I lay there in the hospital bed overtaken with these strong emotions, I suddenly realized something else: that if I, being such a finite and limited human being, could love my child so ferociously and passionately, how much more must my heavenly Father, who is infinitely huge and powerful, love me? God loved me even more ferociously and passionately than I could imagine, and that meant that even if the rest of the world thumbed their noses at me and rejected me, if I knew that God loved me like that, it wouldn't matter.

Another truth that God used to heal my broken self-image came when I read in the gospel of John that "as many as received Christ [and I had], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." I learned that simply being a human being doesn't make us a child of God—that just means we are creatures made in His image. I became a child of God when I trusted Christ to save me from my sins, and according to what Jesus said, I was born again at that point into God's family. Shortly after I learned about being a child of God, I came across one of my favorite names for God in the Bible: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Then suddenly I put the two things together: if God is the King of Kings, and I am a child of God, then the female child of a King is a PRINCESS!!



I made it!! When you look at me, I might not look like much on the outside, but I know that I am a princess on the inside because my heavenly Father the King made me one when I became His child!!

The Hole in My Soul

The other area where God keeps working with me is the whole issue of polio. After I'd been a new Christian for a few months, I heard about a counselor who was sometimes able to pray for people and they received physical healing. So I made an appointment and went to see her.

I said, "Look, I've had polio almost all my life and I don't want it anymore. Would you please pray for me and heal me?"

She replied, "Well, I must tell you that sometimes God chooses to heal people in heaven, but first, tell me about how you feel about your polio."

"I don't like it, and I want you to heal me."

"Not so fast. How do you feel about God for letting this terrible thing happen to you?"

"Everything's fine with God and me. Could we just get on with this?"

"No, wait. Having polio is an awful thing. Aren't you just a little bit angry with God for letting this bad thing happen to you?"

I instantly thought, "Good girls don't get mad at God," and

said, “NO, I’M NOT ANGRY WITH GOD!! Please, just pray for me and I’ll get out of here.”

The counselor smiled gently at me and said, “Sue, I’m afraid that no amount of healing is going to happen in your life until you’re honest with God. I can see that you have a great deal of anger and bitterness and resentment toward God for letting you have polio, and you need to deal with that first.”

“You’re not going to heal me?” I asked plaintively.

She shook her head and said, “I’m not the One who does the healing. I think you need to go pray about what’s going on inside of you first.”

I was terribly disappointed. I had had such hope that finally—FINALLY—I would be rid of the awful, horrible effects of this disease! Polio had ripped a huge wound in my soul as well as damaging my body, but this woman wasn’t going to do things my way. Sadly, I got in my car and drove home.

Along the highway, I prayed, “God, this woman seems to think I have all this anger and bitterness and resentment stored up against You because of the polio. Is there anything to this?”

It was as if God said, “Finally, My precious daughter, you ask the right question!” I realized that I had been stuffing a lifetime of disappointment and pain into an emotional basement, and God was opening the door that I had kept shut for years. Feelings and memories started coming back to me out of the basement, like the time I was about ten years old.

I knelt next to my bed one night and poured out my heart to God. “God, please PLEASE heal me! I *hate* this polio, You know how much I hate this polio! Please, please give me two normal legs! I hate my body, I hate limping, I hate doing the exercises with the boot, I hate going to physical therapy. I hate the lift on my shoe, and I hate having my left leg shorter than the other, and I hate having to wear such ugly

shoes. Oh God, I want to go into a shoe store and buy one pair of beautiful shoes so bad! I hate having to wear different size shoes! And You know I can't wear high heels with my leg and foot being so weak. And God, if I can't wear high heels, how can I get married? Everybody knows that brides wear high heels on their wedding day! Besides, who would want to marry me with polio anyway? I hate this toothpick leg, and I hate *hate* HATE the way people stare at me in public, especially little kids. God, please PLEASE heal me tonight while I'm sleeping!"

Then I proceeded to help God out by giving Him helpful suggestions on how to go about healing me. "You can take the extra muscle from my right leg and transfer it over to my left leg. Then stretch the left leg so it's as long as the right, and pull on my toes so they're not crumpled up anymore. And in the morning I'll run downstairs yelling, "Mom! Mom! God healed me!" and she'll call the *Chicago Sun Times*, and it'll be on the front page: "God Heals Suburban Girl." And I won't be able to go to school because I'll need to go to a shoe store and pick out some beautiful shoes like everybody else's, since my different-sized shoes won't fit. Oh! And God, I'll be able to SKIP down the street! I've never been able to skip!! It'll be great! Now, I'll just go to sleep and while I'm sleeping, You work a miracle. Then, in the morning, I won't even have to throw back the covers to see what You've done. I'll *know*." I fell into bed exhausted, having poured out my hurting heart to God, and so hopefully confident that He had heard me and would do what I asked.

In the morning, I was right: I didn't have to throw back the covers to see what had happened during the night. I knew without checking: absolutely nothing. NOTHING!! God had ignored me! I was *furious*. "God, how could You? I poured out my heart to You and You ignored me! You KNOW how much I hate the polio, You KNOW how much I want to be healed! It's no big deal for You to do this for me! If You could part the Red Sea,

I know you could heal me! HOW COULD YOU????” Then suddenly, I realized that, in my little ten-year-old heart, I was yelling at God, and I was horrified. Good girls don’t get mad at God! So I took all the feelings of anger and disappointment and grief and stuffed them all down in my basement, along with all the other feelings I’d stuffed down there over the years.

And now, here I was, 20 years old, and all these feelings and memories were flooding back, and I realized that the counselor was right. I *did* have a huge amount of anger and bitterness and frustration stored up against God. . .and I didn’t have a clue as to what to do about it. I’d never heard anyone speak on “What To Do When You’re So Mad At God You Want to Spit in His Face.” That sounds blasphemous! But that’s how I felt, and I didn’t know what to do about it.

So I prayed, “God, I don’t know how to handle all these feelings, so I’m asking You to show me what to do. And God, it looks like You’re not going to heal me of the polio either, are You? So please help me deal with it. I’ve always hoped that when I was grown up, it would magically go away, but that isn’t going to happen. You’re going to have to show me how to deal with the polio, too.”

God is faithful, and He answered my prayer. In two ways.

God is Always in Control

First, I learned what has been the single most comforting truth I’ve ever learned as a Christian: that God has always been in control, and nothing has happened to me that He did not allow to pass through the grid of His love and purpose for my life. It was as if there were a suit of armor around me from the moment I was conceived, and nothing has touched my life that God did not purposely allow to get past the armor. I did not get polio by accident; there was a reason for it. When God saw that polio virus heading for me, He allowed it to do the exact amount of damage to my body that was in His plan for

me. But once again, this was a truth I only learned in my head, and the heart-understanding didn't come until the day I took my second son Kevin to an immunization clinic for a shot.

I held him in my arms so that he was facing outward, his little thigh exposed. When the nurse stuck him, he wheeled around, and just before letting out a huge yell, he fixed me with a look of intense betrayal. I knew that if he had been able to put into words what he was feeling, he would have screamed, "You're my MOTHER!! I can't believe you let this woman attack me with that huge STICK!!" I thought, "Oh Kevin, I know you can't understand why I would allow this woman to attack you with that stick. Honey, I *drove* you here so she could attack you with that stick."

What I wanted to say, but it would have been pointless, was "Baby, I know how hard it is for you to understand what's happening. But my Mommy mind is so much bigger than your Baby mind, there's no way I can explain that I know what I'm doing, and I'm letting you hurt because I love you and I'm acting in your best interests, even though all you can feel right now is the pain. I'm so sorry, but you're just going to have to trust me."

I thought, "I'm going to take you home and give you some Tylenol, and you'll start to feel better, and in a few days all the pain and discomfort will be gone, but the good medicine inside you will make you strong and healthy for many years. Some day you won't even remember that today happened, but the benefits of this shot will last for a long, long time."

Right about then we walked out into the sunlight, and God spoke to me very quietly, on the inside: "My precious Sue, I know how much you hurt because of the polio. I hate it too—in fact, I hate it even more, because it was never part of My perfect Creation in the beginning. When sin entered the world and spoiled everything, polio was unleashed into My beautiful

world. I hate for you to suffer like this. But just as My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts, I can't explain to you what I'm doing with the polio any more than you can explain what you're doing to Kevin, and that his suffering is good. Sweetheart, you're just going to have to trust Me."

Then I realized that just as Kevin's pain was going to go away in a matter of days, leaving him years and years free from the pain from the diseases he wasn't going to contract, I needed to see the pain of my polio'd body in the scope of eternity. If my body lives to be 100, which is a very generous estimate, and I have to deal with polio for over 99 years, all that time is still only going to be the length of a pinprick compared to the billions and billions of "years" I'm going to live in heaven—in a *perfect* body. My life on earth does have it difficulties and pain, but it's still temporary when I remember that the majority of my life will be lived in heaven where all pain will be behind me. And just as Kevin's vaccination produced health in his body, I realized that God was using polio to produce character and depth and His kind of beauty in me, which will last for all eternity.

Giving Thanks for Everything

The other way God answered my prayer was in discovering a little book (Merlin Carrothers' *Power in Praise*) that said God wants us to give thanks for *everything* that happens to us. Not just *in* everything, not just the things we think will work out all right, but everything that comes into our lives. The reason we can give thanks is because of the first lesson I learned, which is that God is in control and has unseen, unknown purposes for what touches our lives. The Bible never tells us to FEEL thankful; it just says to give thanks, which is an act of the will and not of emotion. I looked it up, and sure enough, in black and white, there it was Ephesians 5:20. Even in the Greek!

The book is full of story after story of how God changed people's hearts when they thanked Him for things they hated but couldn't change, and I knew I had stumbled across some wonderful wisdom. I remember where I was the first time I told God "thank You" for the one thing I never, ever thought I could give thanks for: my polio.

"God," I started, "I certainly don't FEEL thankful for polio, but Your word doesn't say to go by feelings but by faith, and Your word says to give thanks for all things. So I thank You for letting me have polio. Thank You for my limp. Thank You for the problem that shoes constantly give me, and how hard it is to find them for my mismatched feet. Thank You that I will never be able to wear high heels. Thank You for the way people stare at me. Thank you for all the physical therapy I had to go through, thank You for the boot, thank You for the surgeries, thank You for the brace I had to wear. Thank you that I don't know how well my body will hold up as I get older. I thank You for all these things."

As I disciplined myself to say "thank You" for these things I hated but couldn't change, something interesting started to happen. I realized that saying "thank You" enabled me to relinquish all the pain and anger I had stored up in my emotional basement, and God took it away and replaced it with His peace. Pain had carved huge caverns in my heart, but now instead of being filled with all the negative emotions I had hidden in there, all that space was now filled with peace and a marvelous joy that came from trusting in the One who loves me perfectly. (In fact, since I'm only 5 feet tall, sometimes I think I'm bigger on the inside than I am on the outside!)

Something else that was interesting happened as I made myself give thanks for this horrible thing I hated but couldn't change. In addition to giving thanks by faith but not by feeling, I found that there were a bunch of things that I could easily, and with feelings of gratitude, give thanks for. I thank God for my parents, who loved me enough to make me

exercise and endure surgeries so that I could walk as well as I did. I thank God for my husband, who, even though he's a runner, has never made me feel in the least bit inferior for not being able to keep up with him, and who is exceptionally gracious and sensitive in making allowances for my limitations. I thank God that if I had to have polio, it was in my leg and not in my arms. I'm a calligrapher, and it would be awfully hard to do hand lettering with my toes! I thank God that, even though I have to use a wheelchair in places like airports and amusement parks and malls, when I get to where I'm going, I can get up and walk. And there isn't a day that goes by that I don't thank God for my handicap permit! I get the best parking spaces!

I love happy endings, but this story doesn't have one. At least not as far as my earthly life is concerned. I still have to discipline myself in my reactions and attitudes concerning my body, because I'm now forced to deal with post-polio syndrome. 30 to 35 years after the onset of polio, a whole new set of symptoms crop up: bone-crushing fatigue, increasing muscle weakness, and pain. So far I don't have much trouble with the pain part (thank You LORD!!!!), but I've had to completely restructure my lifestyle to accommodate a body that is losing strength and ability.

One day, as I was reading 2 Corinthians 12, I puzzled over Paul's re-statement of what God told him concerning his thorn in the flesh: that His power was perfected in weakness. I knew there was a nugget of comforting wisdom in that, and asked God to reveal to me what He meant. He answered my prayer one day when I was looking out a large plate glass window. Next to it was an expanse of brick wall. I was able to look out through the window and see not only a beautiful landscape outside, but I noticed that the sunlight was streaming in through the window. The sun was shining on the other side of the brick wall, too, but I couldn't see it. Then I realized that a glass window is fragile, transparent, and easily broken, but it lets

the light shine through. A brick wall is strong, opaque, and is difficult to break it down, but nothing gets through it. When we are weak, whether physically or emotionally, we're like the fragile glass window, and God's power can stream through us, bringing power where we are powerless. When we're strong, like the brick wall, it's difficult to trust God because we're content in our own human strength—but no light, no supernatural power comes through. I am at the place where I'd rather be a window than a wall, because I want God's power and light to shine through me more than I want strength within myself.

At the time of this writing, I've had a chance to share my story with over 10,000 women, and I've never yet found a person who didn't have some sort of private heartache. Everyone has something about herself that she hates but can't change. Mine is on the outside, but for the majority of women, their heartbreak is on the inside. Allow me to encourage you to think about two things as you consider *your* private heartache.

What To Do With the Things You Hate but Can't Change

First, think about how much God loves you. He proved it once and for all by sending His only Son to die a horrible death in your place, so that you could be reconciled to Him. One truth has been of untold comfort to me: His love is stronger than my pain.

Second, the way to truly relinquish the anger about your private heartache is to give thanks for it. It occurred to me one day that every difficulty in our lives is a beautiful gift wrapped in really ugly wrapping paper. That's because God loves paradoxes, and He wraps His best gifts in tremendously daunting "paper." Imagine if someone held out a gift to you wrapped in the newspaper that had spent several days at the

bottom of the garbage can, soaked in chicken juice (ew YUCK!) and covered with coffee grounds, with maggots crawling all over it. You'd say, "What in the world kind of gift could possibly be inside such a grotesque wrapping?"and shrink back from it. But God does exactly that. Many of us never get past the paper to open the gift. But that's what giving thanks will do for you—get you past the ugly wrapping paper to the choice gift inside. For me, it was a heart full of peace and joy. For others, who were sexually abused for example, it's the delight of discovering He will restore the chunks of your soul that other people stole from you. For still others, it's learning that even though you never had the earthly Daddy you should have had, you have a heavenly Daddy who loves you more perfectly and intimately than you can ever know till heaven.

But giving thanks is not a magic formula; it doesn't do any good unless you first have a personal relationship with God by knowing and trusting His Son, Jesus Christ. It is essential that you turn from depending on yourself and your own efforts, and trust Jesus to save you from your sin, placing yourself in God's hands. If you're feeling like there's a rope wrapped around your heart and it's being tugged from the other end, please let me encourage you to identify that as God Himself, pulling you toward Himself and saying, "I love you! I created you to be in fellowship with Me! Please come to Me and give Me yourself so I can give you Myself." If that's what you're feeling, I suggest you tell God something similar to what I'm going to share with you, and what Andre Kole shared with me the night I trusted Jesus:

"Dear God, I realize I'm a sinner and You are a holy, perfect God. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to die on the cross in my place. I trust Him now to save me from my sin and to come live inside me. Please make me into the person You want me to be. Amen."

“I Have Some Basic God Questions”

Question #1: In John 1:3 it says, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Did God made Satan?

Question #2: Where was God when heaven and earth were not yet created?

Question #3: In John 10:30 Jesus said, “I and my Father are one.” Does this mean that Jesus is the Father also?

Question #4: Does this mean that Jesus knew all the events as the same as the Father also?

Question #5: In Ephesians 2:9 it states, “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Does this mean “good works” is not necessary?

> **Question #1: Did God made Satan?**

“Satan” means adversary. God created the angel who became Satan (i.e. the Adversary), but God created this angel (and everything else) good (Genesis 1:31). The fall of Satan may be described in Ezekiel 28:11-19. If so, note that before his fall he was created perfect and blameless (vv. 12, 15).

> **Question #2: Where was God when heaven and earth were not yet created?**

Where was God before the creation of heaven and earth? Since God is omnipresent (i.e. present everywhere – See Psalm 139:7-12), He was present “everywhere.” Of course, prior to the creation of the universe, it’s difficult to know precisely

what this might mean. However, since God is eternal, He has always existed; since He is omnipresent, He has always existed "everywhere" (whatever this might mean).

Question #3: Does this mean that Jesus is the Father also?

No; Jesus is the incarnate Son of God. The Father and Son are both God, but they are distinct Persons within the Godhead. John 1:1 helps us to see this. Notice that the Word (God the Son) was WITH God (i.e. the Father). This implies a distinction between the Father and the Son. But we also read that the Word WAS God. This implies that the Son, like the Father, is fully God. This obviously leads us into the mystery of the Trinitarian nature of God. God is one in essence, but subsists as three distinct Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christians do NOT believe in three Gods. They believe in ONE God who subsists as THREE distinct Persons.

Question #4: Does this mean that Jesus knew all the events as the same as the Father also?

While incarnate on the earth, there were some things that were known by the Father, but not the Son (see Mark 13:32). I see this as a temporary and voluntary limitation of the Son's exercise of His Divine attributes while incarnate upon earth. Philippians 2:5-11 indicates that Jesus "emptied Himself" by becoming a Man. He did not give up His Divine attributes (for then He would no longer be God), but He freely consented to a temporary limitation of the exercise of these attributes while incarnate upon earth. As God the Son, He knows everything that the Father knows. Both the Son and the Father are omniscient (i.e. all-knowing).

Question #5: Does this mean "good works" is not necessary?

Good works are not necessary for salvation, for salvation is a *gift* of God (Ephesians 2:8). Nevertheless, good works are important, for as Paul says in Ephesians 2:10, believers are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared

beforehand, that we should walk in them” (see also Titus 3:8). In other words, we are saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ, completely apart from our works. But we are also saved “for good works” (Ephesians 2:10). Genuine salvation (which comes first) produces the fruit of good works (which come after salvation).

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries