

“Is Navel Piercing OK?”

Dear Sue,

Recently, I have been thinking about piercing my belly button. I am 13. And you have to be 14, which I will be turning in a couple of months. My mom strongly disagrees, for reasons which I don't agree with. She thinks it is radical. I think piercing anything on your face is radical. Or your tongue. There are others. But I think your belly button is pretty normal. She was also worried about the health issues.

Some of my friends got theirs pierced, so I want to see how it goes with them. She also said to pray about it. Which I haven't yet. But I went to Mind Games this weekend, and they mentioned going to Probe.org for questions. So here I am. And I would like to know your opinion on it. I read your article [“What About Body Piercing?”](#) but you had only mentioned the tongue piercing, that you disagreed with. But I'd like to know about the belly button.

I'm so glad you went to Mind Games this weekend!! I wish I'd been there to be able to talk to you in person.

I have a question. Why do you want to get your belly button pierced? What's your motivation? Usually people do it to show it off, but there's nothing modest about a lady displaying her stomach. Can you show off your body to the glory of God? I don't believe so. (The place to show off one's body is for one's spouse, in private. Check out the Song of Solomon in the Bible.) You would be drawing attention to yourself, not TO Him or FOR Him. We are called to modesty (1 Tim. 2:9), and the whole navel-piercing fad is anti-modesty.

Secondly, lots of people have problems with infection. Body piercing is not healthy, and God wants us to be good stewards of the bodies He gave us.

Third, God's will is that you submit to your parents until you are on your own as an adult. Parents have a different perspective that comes from having lived longer, and that includes seeing the consequences of people's choices that are unseen at the time of their choice. If your mom says no, then I can definitely tell you that it is not God's will for you to pierce your navel and you will be sinning if you do.

I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“How Do We Discern God's Will?”

Ray and Sue,

I was hoping I could take a few minutes to ask a question and draw upon your experience and wisdom. It concerns knowing the will of God and faith and confidence. We have a decision to make in our family, and there are good reasons to believe we should go through with it, for the benefit of many of us. There are many factors involved: financial, relational, comfort, influence of the children, etc. And, though I may be convinced it is the right thing, there is still an uneasiness. Now, I know many of the principles of finding God's will:

- *What is righteous*
- *Peace after prayer / Clear feeling of direction*
- *Open and closed doors*
- *Blessing to others*
- *Wisdom of scripture*

▪ *Wise counsel (uh, that would be you guys!)*

My question is whether my uneasiness is a lack of faith. In studying science (and especially probability and statistics), we define confidence as a measure of certainty, and it is always somewhere on the continuum between 0 and 1, exclusive of the endpoints. So, I feel that I cannot say anything with 100% confidence, though I may approach that on the most serious issues in life. And when I want to determine the will of God in the gray areas, my confidence is much less than on things of which I'm doctrinally certain.

If it is a lack of faith, does this have spiritual implications I'm unaware of? I mean you can say I'm sure God exists, and I'm certain Jesus was raised from the dead. To some extent, though, my confidence is based upon my perception of these realities. Any my perception can always have a (remote) possibility of being false, right? The easiest person in the world to fool is myself (Richard Feynman). Even if I know God wants me to walk that tightrope, I may still have an uneasiness as I do it, right? Is this a lack of faith? What am I missing here? What are your experiences regarding this?

Thanks for your time. I'll be very appreciative of any insight you can throw my way.

Dear _____,

Good to hear from you. Glad to know God is leading you into places of uncertainty!

Let me explain. It sounds like you have availed yourself of godly wisdom and sound counsel. Your hesitancy is not so much a lack of faith as it is a normal human reaction to change. It's called fear! Stepping out of our comfort zone! When a soldier is asked after performing a heroic deed in battle if he was scared, he invariably says YES! Courage is not the lack of fear but the ability to do what is right in the midst of

fear. Jesus Himself experienced the agony of Gethsemane. It wasn't a lack of faith He wrestled with, but the very real fear of separation from the Father. Once He was convinced that the path ahead was the will of the Father, He went ahead despite the fear.

Each time I was elected chairman of the elders at our church (two consecutive years), I experienced times of wrestling with God whether He really wanted me to do that. I was scared of not being able to measure up. I felt unqualified. But once I was convinced that this was His path, I was still scared and insecure but determined to follow His path for me regardless of the consequences.

I have found that this is precisely where God wants us so we can depend on Him and not ourselves. If we are fully confident in our own abilities and decision-making, then our confidence is in our own flesh and not in Christ. Sometimes we need to be put in a rather squeamish or uncertain position, so we can recognize that it got done by His grace, and God gets the glory and not us.

If God is leading you in an uncertain or slightly scary position or decision, that means He is giving you an opportunity to grow. Will you trust Him or yourself? He won't shout or make it so plain as to be a no-brainer. He wants to see if you are listening to that still small voice despite the contrary noise of your flesh. I have never regretted stepping out when it didn't always make complete sense. The fear or uneasiness often doesn't dissipate until well after the decision is made and the results begin to show.

You are right to say that we are never entirely certain of anything. But that is not a lack of faith, just being human.

As a whole, I am firmly convinced that the church suffers today because too many are unwilling to face their fear or indecision and truly rely upon God and not themselves. I think

you already know what is the course He wants you to follow. My advice is to make the decision knowing that at every step you are relying on Him and not yourself.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin

Dear _____,

So good to hear from you, and thank you for honoring us with this question!! I loved what Ray wrote and mega-dittoes to him on everything he said. I just have one thing to add. . .

I think that when we have a decision to make, it's either between two good things OR between the right thing and the wrong thing (or possibly wise and unwise). If it's a choice between good things, we can choose either one and the Lord will be glorified and He will accomplish His purposes either way. In that case, it's been my experience that we don't necessarily get a super clear "YES, DO THIS AND DON'T DO THAT" kind of response from the Holy Spirit. Which can be a little unsettling because we want clear direction and instead what we get is the Lord saying, like a waiter opening the menu before you, "Choose whatever you want and you'll enjoy whatever you choose."

Then there's the other kind of choice, which is between right and wrong or wise and unwise. I like to think of those as "red light/green light" kinds of choices. Either the Lord gives us a red light ("Stop! Don't do it!" or a check in our spirit) or a green light, which is either a sense of being given permission or a lack of any constraint otherwise (and sometimes it's a clear "Go for it!").

So my question is, is your uneasiness due to a "red light," in which case making that choice would be disobedience, or simply the reality that you're not completely sure?

Sounds to me like it's the second, which takes you back to what Ray said about the humanness of experiencing fear as we step outside of our comfort zone.

Hope this helps!

Warmly,
Sue

Problems and Promises of Petitionary Prayer

Experimenting With Prayer

We pray for all sorts of reasons. When we've done something wrong, we may unburden our conscience by confessing our sin to God. When we're grateful for some blessing, we may offer up a prayer of thanksgiving. When we're contemplating God's work in creation, we may offer up a prayer of worship or adoration. But one reason that almost all of us pray is to ask God for something. Granted, we may often do this selfishly, or foolishly, or with all manner of wrong motives. But the thing itself, our making requests of God, is a perfectly legitimate thing to do. Indeed, when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he taught them (among other things) to make requests, such as "Give us each day our daily bread" (Lk. 11:3).

Although heaven undoubtedly receives millions of requests each day, there's possibly none more common than that which asks God for healing. While I was writing this article, my father was admitted to the critical care unit of a local hospital. Each day, I (along with many other Christians) prayed that he

might be healed. But after two weeks, he went to be with the Lord. Naturally, this raises a very serious question. Do our prayers *really* make any difference, or are we just wasting our time?

Recently the *New York Times* ran a story with an intriguing title: “Long-Awaited Medical Study Questions the Power of Prayer”.[\[1\]](#) “Prayers offered by strangers,” the story began, “had no effect on the recovery of people who were undergoing heart surgery. . . . And patients who knew they were being prayed for had a higher rate of post-operative complications like abnormal heart rhythms.” What are we to make of this? Are prayers for healing to no avail? Might they even be counterproductive?

In a fascinating essay titled “The Efficacy of Prayer,” C. S. Lewis questioned the value of such experiments. He realized, of course, that one could set up such an experiment and ask people to pray. But he doubted the *wisdom* of it. “You must not try experiments on God, your Master,” he wrote. He also observed:

Simply to say prayers is not to pray; otherwise a team of properly trained parrots would serve as well as men for our experiment. . . . You are not doing it in order that suffering should be relieved; you are doing it to find out what happens. The real purpose and the nominal purpose of your prayers are at variance. . . . The experiment demands an impossibility.[\[2\]](#)

Although on one level such experiments with prayer might be *interesting*, nevertheless, for those who have witnessed dramatic answers to their prayers, such studies aren’t likely to be *convincing*. But can we know whether or not prayer is *really* effective?

Providence or Coincidence?

A few years ago I was traveling to Kansas to attend a friend's wedding. The sun was just about to set for the evening when I suddenly got a flat tire. I pulled to the side of the road, got out, and prepared to change the flat. I soon realized, however, that this was going to be a bit tricky. Although I had a spare tire, I had no tools to change it!

Now there have been many times when this would have really made me angry. But on this occasion, I simply bowed my head in prayer and asked God for his help. I then sat down on the hood of my car to wait. I was a bit concerned because I knew it would soon be dark. But since there wasn't anything that I could do about *that*, I simply determined to trust the Lord.

In less than a minute, a friendly looking guy with two kids pulled to the side of the road. I explained my situation, and before I fully understood what was happening, he had his tools out and began to change my tire for me. Within about five minutes I was back on the road, praising God for his help in my time of need!

Now understandably, I looked upon this incident as a direct answer to my prayer. But can I really know if this interpretation is correct? Was it *really* God who helped me, in response to my prayer? Or would that man have stopped and changed my tire anyway? Unfortunately, apart from God telling me one way or another, there just doesn't seem to be any way to know for sure.

But I don't think we should be troubled by this. The fact that we can't *prove* a strict causal connection between what we ask God for in prayer and what actually happens in the world shouldn't really surprise us. After all, we can't *always* prove a causal connection between what we ask our neighbor for and what actually happens! Your neighbor may feed your cat while you're away on vacation because you asked. Then again, "Your

neighbor may be a humane person who would not have let your cat starve even if you had forgotten to make any arrangements.”[\[3\]](#)

Of course, it may sometimes be possible to prove a causal connection between what I ask my neighbor and what he actually does. But this isn't *always* the case. “Thus in some measure the same doubt that hangs about the causal efficacy of our prayers to God hangs also about our prayers to man. Whatever we get we might have been going to get anyway.”[\[4\]](#) On the other hand, the Bible also assures us that sometimes we don't have because we don't ask (James 4:2). So in the end, we may just have to learn to live with a bit of mystery about our prayers.

Whatever We Ask?

The most radical promises about prayer found anywhere in Scripture occur on the lips of Jesus. The nature of these promises is nothing short of staggering. Just listen to what Jesus tells his disciples: “And I will do whatever you ask in my name You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:13-14). Or again, “I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 16:23).

What are we to do with such incredible promises? On the surface, Jesus seems to be saying that he or the Father will do *whatever* the disciples ask. But is this *really* what Jesus meant? If so, it seems to raise a very serious problem. After all, do we *always* get what we ask for? And would it really be good if we did?

If my own experience can be trusted, then it seems to me that Christian philosopher William Lane Craig is quite correct when he writes, “If we are ruthlessly honest with ourselves, every one of us knows that sometimes God does not answer our prayers.”[\[5\]](#) Indeed, he continues, sometimes God “*cannot*

answer our prayers because Christians are praying for contradictory things.”[\[6\]](#) He asks us to imagine “two Christian athletes playing on opposite sides in the Super Bowl Each would naturally be disposed to pray that his team would win, and yet both prayers could not be answered, for the two athletes would be praying for contradictory results.”[\[7\]](#)

In addition, it’s not very hard to think of examples in which it might be *unwise* for God to give us whatever we ask. After all, finite and fallible human beings are often inclined to ask God for rather foolish things. It wouldn’t always be best for God to give us whatever we requested. For example, suppose a godly young man who desperately wants to serve the Lord as a foreign missionary is praying that God will grant him a particular young lady to be his wife. But suppose that this young lady has a passion to serve the Lord here in some way. Finally, suppose that they would both be miserable and spiritually unproductive if they married each other, but they would both be deeply satisfied and productive in the work of the Lord if they each married someone else. Would it really be wise for God to grant this young man’s request? It sure doesn’t seem like it. Sometimes, as Garth Brooks observed, we can all thank God for unanswered prayers!

Qualifying Christ’s Promises, Pt. 1

But if all this is so, then what’s become of Jesus’ radical promise to do whatever we ask in his name? It seems to me, quite simply, that Jesus’ promise must be qualified somehow. But is it really wise to tamper with Scripture this way?

Let me suggest two responses to this. First, I think that when his words are properly interpreted, Jesus himself qualifies his promises right from the start. Second, the other qualifications I will mention are all firmly rooted in the Scriptures. In other words, we won’t be tampering with the Bible. We’ll rather be looking at its teachings to see if there are any qualifications expressed elsewhere in its pages

that might qualify Jesus' promises in some way.

But let's go back to that first point. Notice what Jesus says in John 14:13: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father." Immediately we see that Jesus hasn't really given a blanket promise to do whatever we ask. Rather, he's qualified his promise to do whatever we ask *in his name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father*.

What does it mean to ask for something *in Jesus' name*? Many people treat this phrase as something akin to a magical formula. By saying the right words, in the proper sequence, they think that God is somehow obligated to give them what they've asked for. But this is certainly *not* what Jesus had in mind! Instead, to pray for something *in Jesus' name* is to pray for something that's consistent with the *character* and *purposes* of Christ in the world. As Merrill Tenney observes, "In prayer we call on him to work out his purpose, not simply to gratify our whims. The answer is promised so that the Son may bring glory to the Father."[\[8\]](#) So when Jesus promises to do whatever we ask *in his name*, He's not promising to do whatever we ask—period! He's qualified his promise to do whatever we ask that's consistent with his *character* and *purposes* in the world.

But there's more. As we search the Scriptures we find yet other principles that appear to qualify Jesus' promise. Dr. Craig mentions several of these in his book *Hard Questions, Real Answers*.[\[9\]](#) For instance, our requests might be denied because of unconfessed sin in our lives. The psalmist wrote, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18). Further, our requests might also be denied if they arise from impure motives. James states quite pointedly, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives" (4:3).

Qualifying Christ's Promises, Pt. 2

What are some more reasons why our requests to God might sometimes be denied?

First, our prayers may sometimes not be granted because of our lack of faith. Jesus told his disciples, "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mk. 11:24). This verse makes it clear that the Lord expects our prayers to be joined with faith in his ability to grant them.

Second, as William Lane Craig observes, "Sometimes our prayers are not answered because, quite frankly, we don't really care whether they are."^{[10](#)} This was certainly *not* the pattern of the great prayers recorded in Scripture. Consider the example of Hannah, who prayed out of "great anguish and grief" for a son (1 Sam. 1:16). Or Daniel, who upon learning from the writings of Jeremiah the prophet "that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years . . . turned to the Lord . . . and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes" (Dan. 9:2-3). If we're honest, many of us would probably have to admit that our own prayers are often just a pale reflection of the earnest examples we find in Scripture.

So too with perseverance in prayer. We tend to give up far too quickly and easily. Apparently, things weren't much different in Jesus' day. Indeed, he told his disciples the parable of the persistent widow "to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).

These are a few more reasons why our prayers to God might not be granted. But what if none of these reasons applies in our case? What if we've confessed all known sin, our motives are pure, and we've prayed earnestly, with perseverance, and in faith, and still our heartfelt requests to God are denied? What should we conclude then? That God doesn't really care? Or

that he doesn't even exist?

Although we might be tempted to doubt God in such times, it's important to remember one last qualification that the Bible puts on our requests to God; namely, they must be consistent with his will. The apostle John wrote that "if we ask anything according to his will . . . we have what we asked of him" (1 Jn. 5:14-15). But sometimes our requests to God just aren't consistent with his will. In cases like these, although it may not be easy, we need to trust that our loving heavenly Father really does know what's best and that he can be counted on to do it. In other words, we may not always know his mind, but we can always trust his heart.

Notes

1. Benedict Carey, "Long-Awaited Medical Study Questions the Power of Prayer," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2006, <http://nyti.ms/advuuY>.
2. C. S. Lewis, "The Efficacy of Prayer," in *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 6.
3. Ibid.
4. bid., 7.
5. William Lane Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003), 43.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 44.
8. Merrill C. Tenney, "The Gospel of John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 9:146.
9. The remainder of this discussion is much indebted to William Lane Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 47-55.
10. Ibid., 49.

“How Do We Know God’s Will About Infertility?”

I have a few questions. First, does God cause everything to happen or does He just allow most things to happen? I know that He can make good results out of things that seem bad to us, but did He make the thing happen because it was what was best for us, or did it just happen as a result of free/human will? I know that God certainly CAN make things happen, but I just wonder how often He does. It seems that we thank God for the good things that happen in our life. And we should! But is it then right to “blame” Him for the bad in our life? Or maybe not so much blame, but just thank Him for the bad too because we know it’s ultimately for the best? Or maybe we shouldn’t thank Him or blame Him for every little thing, because maybe some things just happen. But typing that out – it just doesn’t sound right.

Many things make me wonder this, but on a personal level, it’s in regards to my and my husband’s infertility. Did God cause this to happen because we must learn something from it, or did it just happen because we live in a fallen world where things like disease, infertility, and bad things as a result of sin and our free will are just going to happen?

Also, in regards to our infertility problem, how do we know what God’s will is for us? We have been trying for 2 years now. We’ve had advanced and expensive treatments that have failed. Sometimes people tell us to “just trust God.” But what do they mean, that we should stop pursuing treatments and just let it happen naturally? I mean, we have medical diagnosis that need treating... one would do the same for a cold, or flu, or cancer right? They would seek help. I feel the same way

about infertility. Do you have an opinion on that? Now, maybe by saying "Just trust God," they mean not to worry so much. And that I can understand. I know that God has a plan and that it will be perfect for us. So I do need to not worry so much. It's just a very emotional issue!

But as far as knowing God's will.... I mean, I just wish I knew if His will for us was to never be parents, or to adopt, or to keep trying for a biological child. We pray for guidance, but it's hard to tell if we're "hearing" God or just doing what we want to do. If I ask God to "speak" to me, will He always? How will I know it is God rather than just myself telling myself, "it's a sign?" Does that makes sense?

Oh, and I don't know what your thoughts are on fertility treatments. We have done in vitro fertilization but we do not believe in destroying any embryos. We also only put in as many as we'd be willing to carry and froze the rest to use in another cycle. We would never do selective reduction or kill an embryo. So I hope if you have time to reply, that you don't automatically say that we should stop fertility treatments because they are immoral... unless you think they are for another reason that I have not mentioned and that you might enlighten me with.

Thanks for your trust in us to help you think through these important issues.

I have a few questions. First, does God cause everything to happen or does He just allow most things to happen?

Ultimately, I think it's really a matter of semantics because of the biblical teaching that God is sovereign. Bottom line is, nothing happens to us without His permission, so whether He proactively caused it to happen or He allowed it to happen, it still has His fingerprints all over it and He has a purpose in it before it ever reaches us to begin with.

I know that He can make good results out of things that seem bad to us, but did He make the thing happen because it was what was best for us, or did it just happen as a result of free/human will? I know that God certainly CAN make things happen, but I just wonder how often He does.

“Just happening” sounds a lot like “accident” or “coincidence.” And in a universe where God is sovereign, there are no accidents. Nothing “just happens” apart from His permission. God is big enough to use both things He directly sends to us, as well as indirectly such as through people’s choices, to accomplish His purposes. The “how often” part is a shrouded mystery that He doesn’t let us in on. There’s no way to know that, only to speculate.

It seems that we thank God for the good things that happen in our life. And we should! But is it then right to “blame” Him for the bad in our life? Or maybe not so much blame, but just thank Him for the bad too because we know it’s ultimately for the best? Or maybe we shouldn’t thank Him or blame Him for every little thing, because maybe some things just happen. But typing that out – it just doesn’t sound right.

Absolutely! And that’s why God calls us to always give thanks for everything (Eph. 3:20). From our very limited perspective, we don’t always know the difference between the good things that happen in our lives, and the bad things. The biggest example of that is the horror and pain the disciples experienced when Jesus died, which devastated them because they thought it was a bad thing, but it was the very best thing that ever happened-until right around the corner, an even better “best thing” happened, when Jesus was raised from the dead. When we give thanks for what feels like a bad thing, we are relinquishing it into God’s hand and affirming our trust in His goodness and His sovereignty. (By the way, this is one of the major lessons God has taught in my Christian

walk. I invite you to read my story, which I call "How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can't Change" here: www.probe.org/how-to-handle-the-things-you-hate-but-cant-change/)

Many things make me wonder this, but on a personal level, it's in regards to my and my husband's infertility. Did God cause this to happen because we must learn something from it, or did it just happen because we live in a fallen world where things like disease, infertility, and bad things as a result of sin and our free will are just going to happen?

Unfortunately, God often doesn't let us know the "why" of our trials. But when you consider that He calls us to honor him in the midst of our suffering (1 Peter 2), then the reason behind them doesn't matter as much as our response to them.

Also, in regards to our infertility problem, how do we know what God's will is for us? We have been trying for 2 years now. We've had advanced and expensive treatments that have failed. Sometimes people tell us to "just trust God." But what do they mean, that we should stop pursuing treatments and just let it happen naturally? I mean, we have medical diagnosis that need treating... one would do the same for a cold, or flu, or cancer right? They would seek help. I feel the same way about infertility. Do you have an opinion on that? Now, maybe by saying "Just trust God," they mean not to worry so much. And that I can understand. I know that God has a plan and that it will be perfect for us. So I do need to not worry so much. It's just a very emotional issue!

Yes, I think that God's command to Adam and Eve to exercise dominion over the earth was the overarching principle that resulted in modern science. So, if there's something that can correct infertility, it makes sense to do what we can (and what we can afford, while still remaining good stewards of the money God has put in our hands). Of course this is an

emotional issue for you. . . it's much more than just a command to "be fruitful and multiply," it's also the desire of your heart which God put there as an element of your femininity and your husband's masculinity!

But as far as knowing God's will.... I mean, I just wish I knew if His will for us was to never be parents, or to adopt, or to keep trying for a biological child. We pray for guidance, but it's hard to tell if we're "hearing" God or just doing what we want to do. If I ask God to "speak" to me, will He always? How will I know it is God rather than just myself telling myself, "it's a sign?" Does that makes sense?

Boy, it's hard when we're trying to discern God's leading, isn't it?

Here's one way to look at it: God will not open a door that violates His will for you. Which is how fertility clinics can put all the right chemicals in a Petri dish, add eggs and sperm. . . . and the stuff just sits there and no baby is made. Only God can create life. (And yes, we can theoretically force a clone, but we can't control whether or not a healthy baby makes it to full-term delivery.) Which is why you have to go with the biblical principles, which are to be fruitful and multiply. If you try in vitro and God doesn't bless it, He is speaking His will to you. You can try to adopt and if God doesn't allow an adoption to go through, He is speaking His will to you.

I think the best route is to commit your desire for children to the Lord, ask Him to guide you, and then move forward, trusting Him to take care of the details. If you have submitted yourselves to the Lord about this issue, then you can rest in Him and in His love for you that He will be faithful to lead you. (My guess is, that describes how you've been living already. . .??)

I do think that often, God leads us through His peace

(consider Col. 3:15, "Let the peace of Christ rule [act as umpire] in your heart. . .") or the lack of it. I often counsel people, "Go to where the peace is." After praying much about it, you probably don't have any peace about the idea of never being parents, for example, which would constitute direction to continue to seek His ways of getting His children into your family, whether by adoption or biology.

Oh, and I don't know what your thoughts are on fertility treatments. We have done in vitro fertilization but we do not believe in destroying any embryos. We also only put in as many as we'd be willing to carry and froze the rest to use in another cycle. We would never do selective reduction or kill an embryo. So I hope if you have time to reply, that you don't automatically say that we should stop fertility treatments because they are immoral... unless you think they are for another reason that I have not mentioned and that you might enlighten me with.

Nope, we don't think they're immoral; we think that using the criteria you specified, that is the God-honoring and life-honoring way to do it.

I hope this helps. I don't have a crystal ball to tell you what you should do, but I CAN encourage you to daily give thanks for your fertility problems, give thanks for your desire for a baby, give thanks that God is in control, give thanks for His faithfulness in guiding you in the process, and give thanks by faith for the baby He has for you, however He chooses to do it.

(And by the way, we experienced secondary infertility after our first baby died, so I have prayed these prayers myself. We have two sons.)

Blessings to you!

Sue Bohlin

Is It Just Entertainment?

The Christian enters the world of entertainment equipped with the knowledge of the clear biblical statements of God's will. He then applies that knowledge to the decisions he makes in regard to entertainment.

Picture a grocery store in your mind. There are many aisles filled with a variety of products. Fresh fruit, vegetables, canned foods, bread, cereal, meat, dairy products, frozen foods, soap, and numerous other items can be found. When we shop in such a store we need to be aware of certain things. These may include the price, size, weight, variety, brand, quality, and freshness. After analyzing all of this, we are left with the most important part of the shopping trip—the decision! We must decide which of the products we will buy.

Our world is a lot like a grocery store. There are a variety of ideas (worldviews) to be considered. Those ideas can be seen and heard through television, music, movies, magazines, books, billboards, and bumper stickers, and other sources. In a sense, we are shopping in the grocery store of ideas. As Christians, we need to be aware of the products. We need to consider what is being sold. Then we need to decide if we should make a purchase.

Most of us want to be physically healthy. Unfortunately, sometimes we don't eat as if that were true. The same is true of our minds. We want to be mentally healthy. But too often we don't "eat" as if that were true! Our minds are often filled

with things that are unhealthy. This can be especially true of the entertainment we choose.

How can we become more aware of the products and make the right purchases when we “go shopping” in the world of entertainment? It is our intent to help answer this question.

A Christian is usually encouraged to think of God’s Word, the Bible, as the guide for life. Of course the challenge of such a position is found in practice, not theory. Living by the tenets of Scripture is not always an easy thing. And we can be tempted to think that God’s ideas are restrictive, negative, and life- rejecting. The “don’ts” of biblical teachings can appear to overshadow a more positive, life-affirming perspective.

Does God Intend for Us to Enjoy Life?

Think of a series of three questions. First, if you make the Bible your standard for living, do you think that means life will be dull? Some Christians tend to live as if the answer is “yes.” This certainly applies to entertainment. It appears that we are to be so separate from the world that we can’t enjoy any part of it. Second, if you wrote a song, a poem, a novel, or if you painted a picture, sculpted a statue, etc., do you think you would know best how it should be sung, read, or understood? Of course the answer is “yes.” It came from your mind and imagination. You “brought it to life.” Third, if God created all things and knows everything about you, do you believe He knows how to bring true joy into your life? Again, the answer is obviously “yes.” You came from His mind and imagination. He “brought you to life.” He knows best how you should be sung, read, and understood. And He relays that information through His word, the Bible. He wants you to enjoy life, but with His guidelines in mind.

What is God's Will for Entertainment?

Just what are those guidelines? What is God's will for us concerning entertainment?

Before this question is answered, it is important to understand that the Bible clearly teaches God's will for much of life. Too often we tend to think of pursuing God's will for reasons that include such things as a particular occupation or marriage partner, and other such important decisions that are not stated clearly in Scripture. But the Bible frequently teaches the will of God for daily living in obvious ways. The following passages demonstrate this:

- A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is arrogant and careless (Prov. 14:16).
- Flee immorality (1 Cor. 6:18a).
- Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things (Phil. 4:8).

Obviously various types of contemporary entertainment are not mentioned in these verses. The Bible "does not endeavor to specify rules for the whole of life." (1) Thus we are challenged to make decisions about entertainment based upon the application of biblical principles. The Christian must know the "principles for conduct: which apply here, which do not, and why. Then he must decide and act. Thus, by this terrifying and responsible process, he matures ethically. There is no other way." (2) In fact, this process signifies our continual spiritual growth, or sanctification. As Hebrews 5:14 states: "Solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Most of us probably don't think of "training our senses," but such a concept surely should be a part of our thinking continually. And the application of such training to entertainment should

be clear.

Years ago I had an opportunity to demonstrate the use of “trained senses” when I attended a heavy metal rock concert at the invitation of a sixteen-year-old friend. He was a new Christian then, and we were spending a lot of time together. He had entered his new life after years of attachment to a certain popular rock musician who was the main act of the concert.

During the evening the musicians heavily emphasized the themes of sex, drugs, and violence, and the crowd of adolescents and pre-adolescents was encouraged to respond, and did. After awhile I asked my friend how Jesus would respond to what we heard and saw. His response indicated that for the first time he had begun to think about this form of entertainment—which had been very important to him—with Christian principles in mind.

Perhaps the most succinct statement of Christian ethical principles is found in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Can you think of anything more than “whatever” or “all”? These all-encompassing words are to be applied to all of life, including our entertainment choices. My young friend made this discovery that night.

What Types of Entertainment are Evil?

What types of entertainment are evil? A simple answer to this is, “None!” For example, the rhythm of rock music is not evil; television is not evil; movies are not evil; video games are not evil; novels are not evil, etc.

Of course it is possible for some to claim, for instance, that pre-marital sex is legitimate entertainment. But the clear admonition of Scripture forbids such activity. And the underlying point is that sex is not intrinsically evil. The

one who is engaged in such activity is taking what is good and misusing it for evil. So evil does not reside in sex, rock music, television, etc. Types of entertainment are conduits for good or evil. People are evil. People who provide entertainment and people who use it can abuse it. A basic premise of theology is that man has a sin nature. We are prone to abuse all things. As Genesis 8:21 states, The intent of man's heart is evil from his youth.

What About Content?

So the Christian is free to make entertainment a part of his life with an understanding that evil resides in people, not forms. But caution and discernment must be applied. We must be alert to the importance of our minds and what they can absorb through entertainment.

Perhaps we need to stop doing some of the things we normally do while listening to music, watching television, etc., so we can concentrate on the ideas that are entering our minds. We might be amazed at the ideas we'll notice if we take the time to concentrate. For example, an old TV commercial says, "Turn it loose! Don't hold back"! We may want to ask what "it" refers to, and we may want to know what is to be "held back." Such a commercial is a thinly-veiled espousal of hedonism, an ancient philosophy that says pleasure is the ultimate good. Ideas are powerful, and they have consequences, even when they come from something as seemingly innocuous as a TV commercial.

Consider the following illustration. Think of your mind as a sponge. A sponge absorbs moisture not unlike the way your mind absorbs ideas. (The difference is you are making choices and the sponge is not.) In order to remove the moisture, you must squeeze the sponge. If someone were to do the same with your "sponge brain," what would come out? Would you be embarrassed if the Lord were to be present? Biblical teaching says He is always present. If we honor Him, we'll enjoy life in the process.

If we are using our minds and thinking Christianly about entertainment we will be more alert concerning content. All entertainment is making a statement. A worldview, or philosophy of life, is being espoused through what we read, hear, or watch. Movies, for example, can range from the introspective existential comedies of Woody Allen to the euphoric pantheistic conjectures of Shirley MacLaine. We are challenged to respond to such content with our Christian worldview intact.

Are We in a Battle?

We must take care of our minds. A battle is taking place in the marketplace of ideas. Entertainment can be seen as one of the battlefields where ideas are vying for recognition and influence. As 2 Corinthians 10:5 states, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." And Colossians 2:8 warns us: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ."

What About the Conscience?

The place of the conscience should also be considered. We must be aware of the possibility of defiling our conscience (1 Cor. 8:7). As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable." The believer who cannot visit the world without making it his home has no right to visit it at his weak points.⁽³⁾ It is the responsibility of each of us to be sensitive to what the conscience is telling us when we encounter those weak points and respond in a way that honors God.

Thus I suggest three steps in cultivating sensitivity to our consciences. First, we should consider what our conscience is

relating prior to the entertainment. Is there something about what we've heard or seen that brings discomfort? If so, it may be a signal to stay away from it. Second, consider the conscience during the entertainment. If we're already watching and listening, are we mentally and spiritually comfortable? If not, we may need to get away from it. Unfortunately, too often the tendency is to linger too long and in the process we find that what may have disturbed us previously is now taken for granted. Third, consider the conscience after the entertainment. Now that it's over, what are we thinking and feeling? We should be alert to what the Lord is showing us about what we have just made a part of our lives.

What Do Others Say?

In addition to an awareness of the conscience, we may benefit from what others have to say. Perhaps the advertising will provide information that will prove to be of help before we decide to participate. Frequently ads will tell us things about the content and the intent of the producers. Also, we may find it beneficial to be alert to what friends may say. The things we hear from them may indicate warning signs, especially if they are Christian friends who are attempting to apply biblical principles to their lives. In addition, some objective critics can offer insightful comments. There are ministries around the country, for example, dedicated to analyzing the latest movies. And there are others that attempt to cover a broader spectrum of entertainment from a Christian perspective. You may benefit from subscribing to their publications.

Of course this encouragement to consider what others say cannot exempt us from personal responsibility. To rely completely on others is an unhealthy practice that can lead to mental and spiritual stagnation. Each of us must be mentally and spiritually alert to the content of entertainment.

Isn't It "Just Entertainment"?

Maybe you've heard someone say, "It's just entertainment"! Is this true?

The principles we have affirmed can lead to several common objections. Our answers to these objections can help us gain additional insight into how we think about contemporary entertainment.

First, some may say that what has been shown in a movie or some other entertainment is "just reality." But is reality a legitimate guideline for living? Do we derive an "ought" from an "is"? Saying that reality has been portrayed says nothing about the way things ought to be from God's perspective. Reality needs analysis and it often needs correction.

Second, a common statement is, "I'm just killing time." The person who says this may be doing exactly that, but what else is being killed in the process? The Christian redeems time; he doesn't kill it. As Ephesians 5:15-16 states, "Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil."

Third, "It won't affect me" is a common objection. Tragically, these can be the proverbial "famous last words" for some. Ted Bundy, a serial killer who was executed for his crimes, began to look at pornography when he was very young. If you had warned him of the potential consequences of his actions in those early years, he probably would have said it wouldn't affect him. We can't predict the outcome of our actions with absolute clarity. In addition, we may not recognize the consequences when they appear because we have been blinded subtly over a period of time.

Fourth, others may say, "There's nothing else to do." This is a sad commentary on contemporary life. If that is true, then God has done a poor job of supplying us with imagination.

Spending hours watching TV each day, for instance, says a great deal about our priorities and use of our God-given abilities and spiritual gifts.

Fifth, young people in particular tend to say, “Everybody’s doing it.” It is highly doubtful that is true. More importantly, though, we must understand that God’s principles don’t rely on democracy. We may be called to stand alone, as difficult as that may be. Sixth, some may say, “No one will know.” Humanly, this is absurd. The person who says this knows. He’s somebody, and he has to live with himself. And if he is a Christian his worldview informs him that God knows. Is he trying to please God or himself?

Seventh, “It’s just entertainment” can be the response. No, it’s not just entertainment. We can’t afford to approach contemporary entertainment with the word just. There is too much at stake if we care about our minds, our witness, and our future.

So what should we do? Should we become separatists? No, the answer to the challenge of entertainment is not to seclude ourselves in “holy huddles” of legalism and cultural isolation. Should we become consumers? No, not without discernment. As we said in the beginning of this series, when it comes to entertainment, we should be as selective in that “grocery store of ideas” as we are in the food market. Should we become salt and light? Yes! We are to analyze entertainment with a Christian worldview, and we are to “infect” the world of entertainment with that same vision.

Notes

1. Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1957), 419.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 428.

Additional Reading

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