

Stranger Than Fiction

T.S. Weaver processes the 2006 fantasy comedy-drama film Stranger Than Fiction through a biblical worldview lens.

I recently watched the movie *Stranger Than Fiction*. I thought it would be profitable to practice apologetic engagement using this form of popular culture, and an ideal opportunity to explore some apologetic themes found in the movie. Most literature has echoes of the biblical storyline since it's the foundation of understanding life in this world. As taught to the [Mind Games camp](#) participants every summer, properly understood, film can be of excellent value in discerning the philosophical positions and shifts in society and can enable the Christian to better respond to his or her culture. When interpreting a film, one should ask the following questions:

1. Is there a discernible philosophical position in the film? If so, what is it, and can a case be made for your interpretation?
2. Is the subject matter of the film portrayed truthfully? Here the goal is to decide if the subject matter is being dealt with in a way that agrees with or contrary to the experiences of daily reality.
3. Is there a discernible hostility toward particular values and beliefs? Does the film look to be offensive for the sake of sensationalism alone?

The main character, Harold, lives a strait-laced, boring, lonely life as an IRS agent, and he realizes he is the main character of a novel being written by a stranger. The novel plot affects his life as the author writes. He realizes this when he hears the narrator's voice describing his nearly every move. This is how the tension starts and then he hears the narrator say something like, "Little did he know, this seemingly inconsequential action would cause his imminent

death." Obviously, death is relatively imminent for all of us, but the context implies his would be coming soon. He is an unmarried, middle-aged man; so, this is the problem of the story: he is going to die sooner than he expected, and he does not know how or when.

Being a seminary student, I wanted to know what Harold was thinking came after death. Why was a premature death (according to him) so tragic? Yet, there was no element to the movie at all that included thoughts of life after death. But, like most movies, there was reflection from Harold about life. Oddly, he did not start the reflection on his own. A literary theory professor had to be the one to ask him an apologetic type of question: "What is your life ambition?" Harold's shockingly shallow (and sad) answer was, "I've always wanted to learn the guitar." He was somehow motivated enough to be a successful IRS agent and do things like count the number of brush strokes while he brushed his teeth every morning, but he had not managed to get around to learning the guitar or answering life's biggest questions such as, "Why is there something instead of nothing? Why am I here? What is my purpose? What must I do to be good? What is my destiny?" I wonder how many other Harolds there are out there. Surely (and hopefully) this is not a good representation of the average American.

Although the thought of death did not lead him to where I thought it should, it did lead him to a lifestyle change and new philosophy. If his old philosophy was, "I need to do well as an IRS agent," his new philosophy was, "I need to enjoy life more and do the things I've always wanted to do before I die." Now you would think this would turn into a hedonistic lifestyle but all he really did was stop counting his brush strokes, stop working, and start learning to play the guitar. However, he did turn his attention to a woman.

Her story was interesting as well, because she dropped out of Harvard Law School to make the world a better place by baking

cookies to make people happy. So, I suppose part of her worldview was that if people are happy, the world is a better place. No one in the movie pressed her on the issue. Harold just accepted it and continued indulging himself with her cookies.

Predictably, this relationship turned into a romance and they both fell in love and started sleeping together. Apparently, sex was not something that needed a covenant of marriage for them. Nor much of a commitment of any kind. Not once during the movie did either of them call each other boyfriend or girlfriend or say the words "I love you."

There was no theological thought presented between the characters for most of the movie. Where some theology did occur with the characters (albeit just undertones) was with the professor thinking through Harold's dilemma and giving him advice. At one point, he realized Harold had no control in the story the narrator was telling about his life, and he told him, "You don't control your fate." He meant the narrator controlled it. So, this jumped out at me as though the narrator were God and Harold, and the professor had a fatalistic theology. This is the point where Harold turned to his new philosophy thanks to the advice of the professor. With this type of theology, I think it is easy to result in the "It does not matter what I do, so I may as well stop thinking about it" mindset, which is where Harold turned.

An odd element to the story was that Harold's wristwatch had thoughts, feelings, and was even able to communicate to Harold. It was as if the narrator was God, and the wristwatch was the Holy Spirit guiding Harold at times. Yet ironically the narrator did not know Harold was a real person, so *she* (there is a rabbit trail waiting to be taken) was unknowingly playing the role of God.

During the tension of Harold's dilemma of soon-imminent death, it was easy to see Harold needed saving, but the mystery was,

who was going to be his savior (playing the role of Jesus)? At first, I thought the professor was going to save Harold by telling him how to avoid death. Then I wondered if Harold was Jesus himself because he eventually became willing to face his death to allow the story to end the way they (the narrator, Harold, and the professor) all thought it ought to (they eventually all met). Then the next thing you know Harold saves a boy from being hit by a bus and Harold is hit in his place. I thought that was the ending of the book and Harold was dead. Consequently, I thought Harold was the savior for the boy and Harold played Jesus.

Harold's tremendously heroic act makes no sense based on the worldview he adopted, but it makes a world of sense based on a Christian worldview. It turns out Harold survived anyway, and it was the wristwatch who was the savior (part of it got lodged in his artery and stopped him from bleeding to death) because the author/narrator changed the ending. Thus, in a way, the narrator was God, the wristwatch was both the Holy Spirit and Jesus.

The redeeming moment was Harold getting to live after all his fear of dying and his life changing "for the better" (at least I think that is the movie wanted us to see). It was better in some ways, but in some ways the word "better" is a stretch because of how shallow the changes in his life were (ignoring the deep change of falling in love because the relationship was as shallow as most romantic comedy movies). The narrator even ties a bow on it all at the end by what seemed like (especially with the montage and the dramatic music) it was supposed to be a deeply profound message of the entire movie and what everyone (including the viewers) should walk away with. Here was the long word-for-word message before the closing credits (and the end of the book in the movie):

As Harold took a bite of a Bavarian sugar cookie, he finally felt as if everything was going to be ok. Sometimes, when we lose ourselves in fear and despair, in routine and

constancy, in hopelessness and tragedy, we can thank God [*the first time He was mentioned*] for Bavarian sugar cookies. And fortunately, when there aren't any sugar cookies we can still find reassurance in a familiar hand on our skin, or a kind and loving gesture. Or a subtle encouragement. Or a loving embrace. Or an offer of comfort . . . not to mention hospital gurneys and nose plugs . . . an uneaten Danish . . . a soft-spoken secret . . . and Fender Stratocasters . . . and maybe the occasional piece of fiction. And we must remember that all these things: the nuances, the anomalies, the subtleties . . . which are in fact here for a much larger and nobler cause, they are here to save our lives. I know the idea seems strange, but I also know that it just happens to be true. And so, it was: the wristwatch saved Harold Crick.

What a load of nonsense. *That* is the final word and message of the story? Life is all about cookies, honorable deeds, comfort, and random material items. Nuances, anomalies, and subtleties save our lives? It *is* strange. How does it "just happen to be true?" In that case, how is one's life different from someone else's? What makes up fear, despair, routine, constancy, hopelessness, and tragedy? Is it no sugar cookies? With this philosophy, what is the point of life? Does this not claim we are all saved? Which nuances, anomalies, and subtleties save us? Are they universal or relative? Or am I not saved because I do not wear a wristwatch?

And why are we thanking God for sugar cookies, but claiming our savior is a wristwatch? What is God's role in all of this? Why does He not get more credit? If He gave us the cookies, should He not at the very least get some praise for giving us the wristwatch also? Obviously, this was a secular movie, and it was far from Christian theology. But there was lostness, salvation, and redemption clear in the story. The worldview offered in *Stranger Than Fiction* is not strong enough to support the challenges of this world, but the Christian one

is. But, hey, thank God for sugar cookies, right?

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Lifting the Spell

Steve Cable critically considers atheist Daniel Dennett's book Breaking the Spell to gain a better understanding of the contrast between the "bright" perspective and a biblical perspective.

Blinded by the "Bright"

Is your belief in God purely the result of natural evolutionary forces? Has Christianity evolved over the centuries to dupe you into belief for its own survival? This proposition may insult your faith, your intelligence, and your self worth. However, it is the central theme of a recent book by Daniel Dennett entitled *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*.[{1}](#)

Philosopher Daniel Dennett is best known for his 1995 book, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, and his July 2003 op-ed entitled "The Bright Stuff." Dennett is a self proclaimed "bright." According to him,



A bright is a person with a naturalist as opposed to a supernaturalist worldview. We brights don't believe in ghosts or elves or the Easter Bunny—or God. . . . Don't confuse the noun with the adjective: "I'm a bright" is not a boast but a proud avowal of an inquisitive worldview.[{2}](#)

I am relieved he is not boasting, but my English teacher would say that "a proud avowal" is a good definition of a boast. In

any case, Dennett is a proud proponent of a naturalist worldview.

The book's premise is that religion is a powerful, dangerous force in need of rigorous study, using the tools of modern evolutionary science. By understanding the natural forces that imbue religion with so much power, perhaps an enlightened world can neutralize religion while retaining the positive benefits, if any. Our hero, Dennett, has ventured into the sorcerer's den of theologians, ministers, and philosophers to break the spell holding us prisoner. He states, "The spell that I say must be broken is the taboo against a forthright, scientific, no-holds-barred investigation of religion as one natural phenomenon among many."[\[3\]](#)

Dennett lobbies for a truly scientific (meaning atheistic) study of the origins and mechanisms of religion. According to Dennett, we had better understand religion before it destroys us. In today's dangerous world, that may not seem to be such a bad sentiment. Romans chapter 1 tells us that religions not based on God's revealed truth are natural phenomenon because they "worship the creature rather than the creator."[\[4\]](#) However, we should examine the implications of his so-called scientific study before biting into the apple with him.

Critically considering some themes from Dennett's book may help us gain a better understanding of the contrast between the "bright" perspective and a biblical perspective. By examining an atheist's misconceptions, we may discover areas where we have unintentionally adopted a "bright" perspective rather than a biblical worldview. Thoughtfully considering the relationship between Christianity and other religions can better prepare us to defend the hope that is in us.

A Bright's View of Religion

What is religion? Dennett begins by defining religion as

“social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is to be sought.”[\[5\]](#) Later he adds that “religion . . . invokes gods who are effective agents in real time and who play a central role in the way participants think about what they ought to do.”[\[6\]](#)

Defined in this way, religion is all about groups of people seeking approval of supernatural agents to obtain real time benefits. He also detects an appearance of design, calling religion “a finely tuned amalgam of brilliant plays and strategies capable of holding people enthralled and loyal for their entire lives.”[\[7\]](#)

You and I are probably not yearning for a social system or an “amalgam of brilliant strategies.” We want an eternal relationship with a real, living God. These definitions are why we sometimes say, “Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship.”

Dennett wants to completely knock the wind out of your sails by stating “that religion is natural as opposed to supernatural, that it is a human phenomenon composed of events, organisms, objects, . . . and the like that all obey the laws of physics or biology, and hence do not involve miracles.”[\[8\]](#) Elsewhere he says that “I feel a moral imperative to spread . . . evolution, but evolution is not my religion. I don’t have a religion.”[\[9\]](#)

For a bright, science does not follow the evidence wherever it leads, but assumes natural explanations exist for every experience. Thus, he proposes that we should study religion by assuming that its foundation is false. That is like playing tennis with your feet tied together—you can never get to where you need to be to return the ball.

Let’s consider a different definition that better captures the role of religion:

My religion is what I believe about the origin, nature, and future of man and our relationship to the supernatural. My beliefs about eternity form the foundation for how I view my life on earth.

Using this definition, Dennett's naturalism is his religion. And, your relationship with Jesus Christ resulted from your religion, your belief that Jesus is God.

To be fair, *organized religion* is a social system for practicing and propagating a common set of religious beliefs. Organized religion may result in some of my beliefs being ingrained rather than chosen, but they are still my belief system. Determining which, if any, of these organized religions is teaching the truth about eternity should be of utmost importance to every person.

The Purpose of Religion

What is the purpose of religion? Throughout his book, Dennett suggests that religions are evolutionary artifacts. Thus, any benefits of religion must be realized here and now to be favored by natural selection. From Dennett's perspective, what religious people say they want from religion is "a world at peace, with as little suffering as we can manage, with freedom and justice and well-being and meaning for all."[\[10\]](#)

He also surmises that

The three favorite purposes . . . for religion are:

- To comfort us in our suffering and allay our fear of death.
- To explain things we can't otherwise explain.
- To encourage group cooperation in the face of trials and enemies.[\[11\]](#)

At first blush, these sound like good purposes, things we all desire (except perhaps the last one for those of us who have

been burned by group projects). Some churches even promote these goals as the primary message of Christianity. But how can these purposes explain Jesus saying, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world"?{12} Or, Paul saying, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory"?{13} Dennett's purposes cannot explain these statements because they are based on a naturalistic worldview where death is the end.

Ultimately, religion is not about this life. It is about the next life. One of my wife's favorite sayings to help in dieting is, "A moment on the lips means a lifetime on the hips." It is this perspective of lasting consequences for our actions that gives religion such power. Whether it is a Buddhist seeking karma, a Muslim seeking paradise, or a Christian seeking crowns in glory, an eternal perspective is a common trait of the devoted.

The essential contrast between religions is not over which can offer the best temporal benefits or produce moral behavior. It is about which one offers the truth about the nature of God, life, and eternity. Salvation occurs when you believe that Jesus is *the way, the truth and the life*,{14} and you confess Him as Lord.{15} In contrast, eternal separation is the result of rejecting the truth. As Paul tells us, "[they] perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved."{16}

The purpose of religion is to propagate the truth about the important questions that determine our eternal destiny. The most important topic to study is not "How can we get the temporal benefits from religion, while really assuming that there is no eternity?" but instead "How can I determine which religion has the truth about eternity?"

Defending the Bright Religion

In *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett proposes evolutionary science can explain religious beliefs as natural phenomenon. He believes his religion, Darwinism, can make the world better by neutralizing the power of theistic religion. One problem; his religion is not accepted by most Americans. Dennett laments:

[O]nly about a quarter [of America] understands that evolution is about as well established as the fact that water is H₂O. . . . how, in the face of. . . massive scientific evidence, could so many Americans disbelieve in evolution? It is simple: they have been . . . told that the theory of evolution is false (or at least unproven) by people they trust more than . . . scientists.{17}

Naturally, Dennett argues for his point of view. His argument exhibits three flaws common in many arguments for Darwinism:

1. *Bait and switch definitions*. The Darwinist says, "Fact: Evolution defined as change over time through natural selection occurs. Fact: Darwinism is based on evolution. Conclusion: Darwinism is proven as the explanation for life in this universe." Claiming that Darwinism is proven because evolution occurs is like the over eager detective stating, "Fact: You were in the city on the day of the murder. Fact: The murderer had to be in the city on that day. Conclusion: You are proven to be the murderer." The two facts are correct, but the reasoning is flawed.

2. *Attack the skeptics, not the evidence*. Dennett states that "there are no reputable scientists who claim (that Darwinism is unproven). Not a one. There are plenty of frauds and charlatans, though." {18} So, anyone who doubts is a fraud regardless of their credentials. His assertion is laughable when one realizes over seven hundred scientists with impressive credentials have signed a statement expressing their skepticism of Darwinism.{19} When you don't have an

answer for the evidence, your only recourse is to attack the witness.

3. *Declare yourself the winner.* Assume Darwinism is true and use that assumption to refute other theories. Dennett states, "Intelligent Design proponents . . . have all been carefully and patiently rebutted by conscientious scientists who have taken the trouble to penetrate their smoke screens of propaganda and expose both their shoddy arguments and their apparently deliberate misrepresentations."[\[20\]](#)

Since defenders of Darwinism attempt to create smoke screens of propaganda, shoddy arguments, and apparently deliberate misrepresentations, it is not surprising that most Americans have not signed up for his religion. However, they control the media and educational systems, so the battle is far from over. Equip yourself to use this conflict to share the truth by checking out Probe's material, [on evolution and Darwinism](#), at [Probe.org](#).

Toxic Tolerance

In *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett assures us that atheism is the best course, but he may be willing to tolerate other religions if it can be shown they produce some benefits. He lists three main options among those who call themselves religious but vigorously advocate tolerance:

1. *False humility.* "The time is not ripe for candid declarations of religious superiority, . . . let sleeping dogs lie in hopes that those of other faiths can gently be brought around over the centuries."[\[21\]](#)

2. *Religious equality.* "It really doesn't matter which religion you swear allegiance to, as long as you have some religion."[\[22\]](#)

3. *Benign neglect.* "Religion . . . really doesn't do any good

and is simply an empty historical legacy we can afford to maintain until it quietly extinguishes itself (in) the future.”{23}

How does your faith fit into his list of viable options? If you believe your religion is true, none of these options makes sense. How can you “let sleeping dogs lie” or say “it doesn’t really matter” when you have good news of eternal significance? Moreover, if your religion is “simply an empty historical legacy,” don’t put up with it any longer. Join with Paul in saying, “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”{24}

Dennett’s tolerance options assume that religions claiming revealed truth cannot coexist without leading to conflict and suffering. To the contrary, religious wars are the result of the selfish ambition of men rather than the conflict between competing truth claims. Jesus gave us the model of authentic religious tolerance when he said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would be fighting.”{25} Christianity is not about physical or political conquest. It is about redeeming people from slavery to freedom, from death to eternal life.

Truth is not threatened when competing worldviews are able to enthusiastically promote their beliefs. When each person is free to seek the truth and make truth choices without fear of reprisals or coercion, the gospel can flourish. Eternity, not religious wars or religious leaders, will eventually be the judge of what is truth. In the end, truth is not determined by the majority, but by reality.

One thing we know to be true is that “God does not desire any to perish.”{26} Consequently, we should not accept any version of tolerance which mutes proclaiming the good news.

Dennett wants to “break the spell” against studying religion as a natural phenomenon. Instead, let’s join together in

lifting the spell of naturalism by proclaiming the truth that Jesus Christ is indeed our Creator and Lord.

Notes

1. Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, Viking Press, 2006.
2. Daniel Dennett, "The Bright Stuff," *The New York Times*, July, 2003.
3. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 17.
4. Romans 1:25. (All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible, update version.)
5. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 9.
6. Ibid., 11.
7. Ibid., 154.
8. Ibid., 25.
9. Ibid., 268.
10. Ibid., 17.
11. Ibid., 103.
12. John 16:33.
13. 2 Cor. 4:17.
14. John 14:6.
15. Romans 10:9-10.
16. 2 Thess 2:10-12.
17. Ibid., 59.
18. Ibid., 61.
19. www.dissentfromdarwin.org.
20. Ibid., 61.
21. Ibid., 290.
22. Ibid., 290.
23. Ibid., 290.
24. 1 Corinthians 15:19.
25. John 18:36.
26. 1 Timothy 2:3.

“Are Single Women Purposeless Beings?”

You have biblically and honestly tackled the question of the roles of women in your articles.

But I have a question concerning the meaning of women's lives. What does the Bible mean when it says that God intended to create a woman to help man? Does it then reduce single women to purposeless beings who have nothing to do on earth? I mean not the widowed, but the never marrieds.

No, the Bible does not reduce single women at all. I believe God's design of women means that when we operate in our strengths and giftings, we are helping other people in a variety of ways. People have many needs on many levels: physically, emotionally, spiritually, aesthetically. When women bring our God-given beauty and sensitivity, nurture and compassion, intellect and leadership skills to our communities, I think we are contributing in ways that matter. Please note, none of these have to do with marital status.

I think of single friends who are teachers, helping children and adults learn and grow.

I think of single friends who are medical professionals, compassionately treating the sick and helping people get and stay healthy.

I think of single friends who are interior designers and decorators or work for them, bringing beauty and order to homes and offices.

I think of single friends who are counselors, helping people deal with pain and problems and restoring them to functionality.

I think of single friends who are serving in ministry,

pointing people to Jesus and helping them grow spiritually.

It's true that God created Eve as a helpmate for Adam, but not all women are called to marriage. Some women are called to help others in their singleness. Many of the women I know, regardless of career or calling, delight in helping others in a variety of ways. And lest anyone think being a helper is an inferior status, may I respectfully point out that God is glad to be our helper? The Psalms are rich with references to God as our helper, our rescuer, our protector. And that's just the beginning. He created us to need help, to need Him and each other, so there is nothing "lesser than" about orienting one's life in terms of helping others.

I hope this helps. <smile>

Sue Bohlin

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Why Dr. Laura is (Usually) Right

Why Dr. Laura Is Popular

Dr. Laura Schlessinger's call-in radio show is wildly popular in North America. According to her web site, Dr.Laura.com, the purpose of her program is to dispense morals, values, principles and ethics. Her refusal to coddle people's self-centered behavior and immoral or stupid choices is either highly entertaining or absolutely infuriating, depending on your worldview. She's opinionated and not afraid to fly in the face of the culture. Most of the time I agree with her, but

sometimes she misses the boat. In this essay I'll be looking at why Dr. Laura is usually right—not because she agrees with me (I mean, how arrogant is that?), but because her positions are consistent with what God has revealed in the Bible.

Dr. Laura rejects the victim mentality. She says, "Victimization status is the modern promised land of absolution from personal responsibility. Nobody is acknowledged to have free will or responsibility anymore."[\[1\]](#) Instead of coddling people because of past difficult experiences, she calls her audience to make right choices. In her book *How Could You Do That?*, she writes, "I don't believe for a minute that everything that happens to you is your doing or your fault. But I do believe the ultimate quality of your life, and your happiness, is determined by your courageous and ethical choices, and your overall attitude."[\[2\]](#) This call to assume responsibility for our choices and our behaviors resonates with us because it is consistent with the dignity God endowed us with when He gave us the ability to make significant choices and not be His puppets. Joshua encouraged the Israelites, "Choose ye this day whom ye shall serve: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). It was a real choice with real consequences. That's because we live in a cause-and-effect universe where "God is not mocked: a man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7).

There is a most interesting postscript in Dr. Laura's book *How Could You Do That?* She quotes from the Genesis 4 passage where God confronts Cain for his bad attitude after He would not accept Cain's offering. God tells Cain, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Gen. 4:7) She makes the point that God seems to be teaching that there is joy in doing right, and "God also reassures us that we do have the capacity to rise above circumstance and attain mastery over our weaker selves."[\[3\]](#) It's a good observation, and this passage makes a

strong statement about what God expects of every person, as a moral creature made in His image. He wants us to do what is right and resist the pull of sin's temptation.

In a culture that gets increasingly secular every day, where we have lost our moral compass, listeners are relieved to hear someone who has a strong commitment to God-given absolutes. Dr. Laura acts like an anchor of common sense for many who find life's choices too confusing and overwhelming in today's postmodern world.

Much of Dr. Laura's "preaching, teaching and nagging" (her words) is directed at helping people decide to make good moral choices. Even if they don't know God, their lives will work better simply because they will be more in line with how God created us to live. (Of course, from a Christian perspective, this has no value in light of eternity if a life that "works better" is lived separated from the life of God through Jesus Christ.)

Dr. Laura's emphasis on honor, integrity and ethics strikes a nerve in eighteen million listeners.[\[4\]](#) No surprise, really: that nerve is common to all of us—the nerve called morality—because we are made in the image of a moral God.

Self-Esteem

One reason why Dr. Laura's values and beliefs attract millions of listeners to her daily radio program is her common-sense approach to the whole issue of self-esteem. When a caller complains, "I don't feel very good about myself," Dr. Laura will fire back a great question: "Why *should* you feel good about yourself? What have you done that gives you a reason to feel good about yourself?" In a culture where people want to believe they're wonderful and worthwhile without any basis for such an assessment, Dr. Laura has a completely different approach: self-esteem is earned.

In her books and radio show, she suggests several means of earning the right to enjoy self-respect, and all of them are good ideas from a pragmatic perspective.

Dr. Laura points out that we derive pleasure from having character. We need to choose high moral values and then honor them during times of temptation. She writes, "There is no fast lane to self-esteem. It's won on . . . battlegrounds where immediate gratification comes up against character. When character triumphs, self-esteem heightens."[{5}](#)

She also says that choosing personal and professional integrity over moral compromise will make us feel good about ourselves in the long run. So will valuing and honoring our responsibilities, which she calls "the express route" to self-esteem.[{6}](#) We build self-respect by choosing loyalty, sacrifice, and self-reliance over short-term self-indulgence.[{7}](#)

In her book *Ten Stupid Things Women Do to Mess Up Their Lives*, Dr. Laura astutely demonstrates one of the differences between the sexes: "Women tend to make a relationship their life, their identity, while men make it a part of their lives."[{8}](#) She's absolutely right. The reason a relationship cannot provide true self-esteem for a woman is the same reason a man's job or accomplishments can't do it: it is idolatry to look to relationships or accomplishments for meaning and purpose. God will never honor our false gods.

But self-esteem is only part of the equation for a healthy view of ourselves. Self-esteem is how we *feel* about ourselves; it needs to be built on the foundation of how we *think* about ourselves, which is our sense of self-worth. How valuable am I? What makes me significant? It doesn't matter how good we feel about ourselves if on a purely human level, we're in actuality worthless.

Pastor Don Matzat tells of a woman who came to him

complaining, “I feel like I am completely worthless.” He blew her away with his response. Gently and slowly, he said, “Maybe you are completely worthless.”[{9}](#) Are you shocked? This lady was. But it’s true. We are only valuable because God made us, not because of anything within ourselves. We are infinitely precious because He made us in His image, able to be indwelt by God Himself. And He proved our value by paying an unimaginable price for us: the lifeblood of His very Son. Apart from God, we are completely worthless.

C. S. Lewis put it so well:

Look for yourself and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.[{10}](#)

Dr. Laura’s right: we earn our self-respect. But our sense of worth is one of God’s great gifts to us, because He’s the one who determines our value.

Man as a Moral Creature

If you call Dr. Laura’s radio program, the screener will ask, “What is your moral dilemma? What is the issue of right and wrong that you want to discuss?” Zeroing in on moral problems and not psychological ones sets her call-in talk show apart from most others. Dr. Laura sees man as a moral creature, capable of choosing good and evil. This is what she wrote in her book, *How Could You Do That?*:

Why do people do good things?

In contrast to all other creatures on earth, only humans measure themselves against ideals of motivation and action. We are elevated above all other creatures because we have a moral sense: a notion of right and wrong and a determination to bring significance to our lives beyond mere existence and

survival, by actions that are selfless and generous.[{11}](#)

It's true, we are indeed elevated above all other creatures by our moral sense. We are far, far more than animals. But where does that morality come from?

Human beings are moral creatures because God created us in His image. That means we can choose between good and evil because God chooses between good and evil. We can think on a higher level, contemplating abstracts and ideals like goodness and nobility, because our minds are a reflection of God's unimaginably complex mind. We can choose to love others by serving them sacrificially because that's what God is like, and He made us like Himself. Dr. Laura thinks it's because we're lapsing into our animal natures.[{12}](#) But we are not the product of evolution. We were never animals. People do bad things because we are born as fallen image-bearers. I love the way Larry Crabb described it: "When Adam sinned, he disfigured both himself and all his descendants so severely that we now function far beneath the level at which we were intended. We're something like an airplane with cracked wings rolling awkwardly down a highway rather than flying through the air. The image has been reduced to something grotesque. It has not been lost, just badly marred."[{13}](#) But our airplanes keep wanting to wander off the runway and go our own way because we let our flesh rule us. That's why we do bad things.

Why do people do bad things?

But although Dr. Laura is right about man being a moral creature, she misses the boat on what it means to be human:

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden they were not fully human because they made no choices between right and wrong, no value judgments, no issues of ethics or morality. Leaving Eden, though, meant becoming fully human.[{14}](#)

They certainly did make a moral choice in the Garden. They chose wrong over right and chose disobedience over fellowship with God. Actually, when Adam and Eve were still living in the Garden, they were more fully human than we've ever been since, because God created man sinless, perfect and beautiful. When we look at the Lord Jesus, the Second Adam, we see just how sinless, perfect and beautiful "fully human" is.

Dr. Laura is right to insist that we see ourselves as moral creatures, because a moral God has made us in His image.

Dr. Laura's Wisdom

Dr. Laura's strong positions on certain topics has made some people stand up and applaud her while others fume in frustration at her bluntness.

She makes no bones about the sanctity of marriage and that sex belongs only within a committed relationship sealed with a sacred vow. People living together and having sex without marriage are "shacking up." She's right because God ordained sex to be contained only in the safe and committed relationship of marriage.

Another of her well-known positions is that abortion is wrong because it's killing a baby. The much better alternative is adoption. She gets particularly frustrated with women who say, "Oh, I could never do that. I could never give up my baby once it was born." Her answer to that is, "You can kill it but you can't wave goodbye?" Here again, she's right because abortion is the deliberate taking of a human life. God's Word clearly commands us not to murder (Ex. 20:13).

Her strong views on abortion continue in her commitment to children, and her disdain for the way so many parents indulge their own whims and agendas at the expense of their kids. In a day when divorce is so prevalent, she makes an impassioned case for doing what's best for the children, with parents

remaining active and involved in the raising of their kids. She believes that the family is the cornerstone of civilization, and this is consistent with the biblical view starting right in the first chapter of Genesis.(Gen. 1:28)

Part of the way parents should take care of their children is to make sure they raise them in a religious faith shared by both parents. Dr. Laura warns people not to enter into interfaith marriages because usually the kids end up with no religion at all. Both the Old and New Testaments warn against being unequally yoked; God knows it's a recipe for heartbreak at best and disaster at worst.

She shows practical wisdom in many ways. She makes a distinction between those who are evil and those who are merely weak. In the same way, the book of Proverbs goes into great detail about the difference between the wicked and the fool.

Another evidence of her wisdom is her response to the fact that some people are uncomfortable keeping secrets, believing it's dishonest to not tell everything you know. Dr. Laura says there is a difference between maintaining privacy and withholding truth. The question to ask is, "Will this benefit the person I tell?" If not, don't tell. The reason this works is that this is how God operates. Everything He tells us in His Word is truth, but it's not exhaustive truth. Plus, God doesn't owe it to us to tell us everything He knows, and He's not being dishonest when He keeps information from us, like the "whys" of our trials and sufferings, or the exact details of how the endtimes will play out.

Finally, Dr. Laura exhorts people to choose "as if" behavior. "What a radical idea: choosing how to behave regardless of how you feel—and discovering that behaving differently seems to change how you feel."[\[15\]](#) In 2 Corinthians 5:7 we are told to "walk by faith, not our senses" (a paraphrase), which is another way of urging us to act *as if* something were already

true instead of being limited by our feelings. I do love Dr. Laura's practical wisdom.

Where Dr. Laura's Wrong

Most of the time, Dr. Laura's views are right on the mark because they are consistent with the laws and values of Scripture. A fairly recent convert to conservative Judaism, she is still developing her own belief system, yet she can be fair and open-minded in considering other viewpoints. But there are some areas where she departs from the Bible's teachings.

For example, Dr. Laura believes that all religions are equally effective for establishing morality. If a young mother calls, looking for a religion in which to raise her children, Dr. Laura doesn't care if it's Hinduism or Islam or Presbyterianism, just as long as there is a *religion*. To her the issue is what works, or what *seems* to work, and most religions are the same to her in the area of shaping behavior. On the other hand, the truthfulness of religious claims is apparently not as important to her. Yet only one religion offers a personal relationship with God on His terms, by His own definition. Only one religion is God reaching down to man: Christianity, with its roots in Judaism.

Dr. Laura misunderstands biblical Christianity. She rejects the notion that Jews can believe in Christ. Many rabbis teach that to be Jewish is to reject Jesus as Messiah; they teach that Jesus is the God of the Gentiles. Two thousand years of unjust persecution feeds a heartbreaking "anti-Jesus" mentality. But Jesus Christ was a Jew, and almost all of the first believers were Jewish. As one messianic rabbi put it, to believe in the Jewish Messiah is the most Jewish thing someone can do![\[16\]](#) Dr. Laura is mistaken in her belief here. When a Jew trusts Christ as Savior, he does not stop being Jewish. What he discovers, in an intensely personal way, is that Judaism is the root, and Christianity is the fruit. He feels

“completed” in ways many Gentiles never can.

What is the purpose of life? Dr. Laura has told many people who are floundering without personal meaning that they need to find their niche in life to do their job, which is to perfect the world. This sounds noble . . . but there is nothing in Scripture that calls us to perfect an unperfectable world. In fact, God plans on scrapping the whole thing and starting over (Rev. 21:1). Perfecting the world is not our purpose in life: the reason we are here is to bring glory to God (Eph. 1:6,12,14).

One other area where Dr. Laura misses the boat is in dealing with guilt. I remember one caller who was filled with remorse and regret over her abortion, and she asked what to do with her guilt. But since Dr. Laura’s belief system doesn’t offer a way of handling it, she advised the woman to just carry the guilt. This is her usual advice in such circumstances because she believes the person will learn a deep life lesson from the continual pain. I grieve that she has no understanding of the cleansing that comes with Christ’s forgiveness. Jesus paid for our sins on the cross, and when we come to Him in belief and trust, He not only forgives the sin but cleanses us of the guilt. We don’t have to carry guilt that He washed away!

There are a few subjects where Dr. Laura departs from the Scriptures, most notably about Jesus and salvation, and we can’t agree with her. But for the most part, as far as her positions and beliefs, Dr. Laura is usually right, and I think she honors God as she proclaims His laws and ways. I just pray she will respond to the light of the WHOLE truth.

[Addendum on why I left out Dr. Laura’s views on homosexuality](#)

1. Laura Schlessinger, *How Could You Do That?* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 8.
2. Ibid., p. 134.
3. www.drLaura.com/about/
4. "No Whining!," *U.S. News and World Report*, 14 July 1997.
5. *How Could You Do That?*, p. 152.
6. Laura Schlessinger, *Ten Stupid Things Women Do to Mess Up Their Lives* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 171.
7. Ibid., p. 157.
8. Ibid., p. 189.
9. Don Matzat, *Christ Esteem* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House), p. 173.
10. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.
11. *How Could You Do That?*, p. 26.
12. Ibid., p. 187.
13. Larry Crabb, *Understanding People* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987), p. 87.
14. *How Could You Do That?*, p. 93.
15. Ibid., p. 257.
16. Personal conversation with the staff of Baruch Ha Shem, a messianic congregation in Dallas, Texas.