

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 indwelled 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](#)

Notes

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.

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