

# **Christian Living**

(Rev. 05/25)

## Are tattoos okay?

Short Answer: Ask your parents. The long answer? Actually, the long answer doesn't really exist in this case because there are NO verses in the Bible that expressly forbid getting a tattoo. In fact, the verse that comes the closest is:

*Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NLT)*

Does this say anything about tattoos? Nope. Nor does it say anything about piercings or other forms of body modification. Within the context of the chapters around it, these verses are specifically based on sexual immorality, sexual sins; not whether you should or shouldn't get a tattoo! Because of that, we can't make this verse say anything more than what it says.

However, there IS another verse that we need to consider:

*Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. - Colossians 3:20 (NLT)*

If your parents have looked at you and said, "You will not get a tattoo while you're living under my roof!", at that point it IS a sin to get one because you're directly disobeying your parents. (By the way, if you're not happy with that verse, check out Ephesians 6:1-3 and Exodus 20:12.)

What you do when you're an adult and outside of your parents' house is between you and God. While at home, you're called by God to OBEY your parents...not agree with them.

On a final, personal note, realize that tattoos are like social media – they never go away! If you do get a tattoo, get one with meaning to you. I know a man who is now a Christian who CANNOT show off any of his tattoos and has to wear a shirt while swimming! I know another big, tough guy who got Tweety on his arm after a...night. Although it's harmless, he's too embarrassed to show off a tattoo that he never wanted in the first place! Just my random thoughts on the subject.

## Can circumcision be compared to baptism (Romans 4:9-11)?

All right, we need to jump right into the Bible if we're going to understand this one:

*Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles? Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith. But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised!*

*Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith. - Romans 4:9-11 (NLT)*

What this is saying is that God made circumcision a sign that Israel had accepted His covenant. They

make the decision to follow God FIRST, and then they are circumcised to show their commitment to the covenant.

In the New Testament, we find much the same thing in baptism. You become a believer first, and then you are baptized. It's part of the covenant relationship with Jesus and shows the world that you've been changed.

The catch is that circumcision is from the old covenant with God and was required of the Nation of Israel, itself, not individual believers. More importantly, ALL males in Israel are circumcised, whether they believed in God or not! (The circumcision took place on the eighth day – the science behind this is incredible, by the way!)

In the New Testament, it's a new covenant. The only people who are baptized are the ones who have placed their faith in Jesus. Instead of EVERYONE getting baptized, it's part of our choice to follow Jesus and do what He commands.

Okay, so where does that leave us? Circumcision was required for a nation, baptism is required for the individual believer. Both are part of a covenant, but circumcision was the old covenant and baptism is the new. Both are commanded by God, but whereas circumcision is a physical change, baptism represents a spiritual change.

Can they be compared? Well, Paul uses circumcision as a metaphor for spiritual change, so the answer would be “yes”. However, I would also argue that this would have made MUCH more sense to a Jewish audience of 2,000 years ago than it does to a Gentile audience of today!

### **Can people be demon-possessed today?**

Absolutely! (Whew! That was easy!) The Bible doesn't say that demon possession came to an end when the Bible was finished being written.

However, being demon-possessed is never a “good” thing. The people in the Bible who were demon-possessed injured themselves (Mark 5:5), threw themselves into fires (Mark 9:22), attacked others (Acts 19:16), had impairments (Matthew 12:22) and more.

The Bible also makes it clear that people can be **spiritually oppressed**. We're told that Satan – and his followers, the demons – can attack us (James 4:7), that spiritual influence can cause us to fall (Ephesians 6:11-13), they can deceive us (1 John 4:1), they can tempt us (1 Thessalonians 3:5), and they can flat-out oppress (“*weigh heavily on*”) us (Matthew 15:22). If we give into their leading, we can easily fall into sin.

On the bright side, a Christian CANNOT be demon-possessed. In 1 Corinthians 6:19, we find:

*Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? - 1 Corinthians 6:19a (NLT)*

If God's Spirit – the Holy Spirit – is inside of us, what place is there for a demon?

### Can you name any good resources for people who want to do their own research?

Okay, I was asked this one in passing, so if I wrote the question down wrong, please forgive me. The one things I DO remember was that when I asked what “resources” they were looking for, they mentioned commentaries and things like that.

Well, if I WAS going to **name** any good resources, I’d pick “strong” names like: Bob, Dirk, and Hercules Schwarzenegger II. Then again, I always “name things” Bob...except my children. (Maria stopped that one.)

Actually, all kidding aside, this is a GREAT question to ask. Why?

The first reason is because I want to STRONGLY encourage you to always do your own research about God. My wife and I were talking on the day that I sat down to answer this about a church where the Pastor was teaching some pretty...horrific views...and people just accepted them. Nobody questioned, dug deep, or asked where those views were found in the Bible.

The second reason is because as you study God, you’ll grow to know more about Him. The more you know about Him, the deeper your relationship with Him will go. You can’t have a “deep” relationship with someone you just meet here-and-there a few times a year.

So, with that, how do you make sure that the resources you use are good? Well, that requires a bit of...effort. To help you, though, I’m going to limit myself and only give you a few dozen suggestions:

#### First, get a good translation of the Bible.

Not all translations are created equal. Some newer translations intentionally change the Bible to make the Bible “less offensive” to humans. As if we’re the ones who should be offended? We disobeyed God, ignored Him, spit in His face...and then we’re upset that His Word hurts our feelings? We have that WAY backwards!

If you want to talk translations, I would recommend that you check these out:

- English Standard Version
- New King James Version
- New International Version
- New Living Translation

Is this the end of the list? Nope. But these are accurate translations and they’re fairly easy to find.

By the way, if you don’t have a Bible, The Rock Church would be honored to give you one.

#### Second, get a Study Bible.

If you’re looking for a Bible, jump right into it and get a Study Bible. A Study Bible contains a TON of notes, maps, and resources that can help you dive deeper into God’s Word. Not sure which one to get, I brought a bunch of Study Bibles with me for you to look at. These include:

- The English Standard Version Study Bible by Crossway
- The New American Standard Study Bible by Barbour
- The New International Version Study Bible by Zondervan
- The New Living Translation Study Bible by Tyndale Publishing

If you DO get a Study Bible, I would suggest avoiding “named” ones. We have Dr. David Jeremiah Study Bibles back there. Don’t get me wrong, these are VERY good. It’s just that the extra information it provides is kind of...limited. A straight-up Study Bible from the publisher is going to give you so much more to work with!

The other thing you have to be aware of is that, with a Study Bible, only about half of the words are God’s. The rest? The commentaries? They’re the words of humans and, as such, they can be wrong. It’s rare, but occasionally I read something in a Study Bible that I do NOT agree with. Study Bibles are good...but they’re not perfect.

Third, check out Biblehub.com.

If you want a great resource, go to <https://biblehub.com>. There you can read different translations of the Bible; you can see a direct translation of words from Hebrew or Greek; and there’s maps, commentaries, and devotions. This website is like a small Christian bookstore rolled up into one site.

The perk to this site is you can check my Greek and Hebrew without ever having to learn it! It’s all right there for you.

Fourth, take some online classes.

There are a TON of good online classes available that can help you to study God. Even better? There’s a TON of free ones! In fact, as I sat down to write this, I checked out the free course offerings through Dallas Theological Seminary...and there are tons of them.

Dallas is a good school, Biblically solid, and the best part? Did I mention the classes are free? (I signed up for a couple while I was there. Just sayin’.)

If you DO pick a school to take online classes from, make sure they’re reputable and Bible-based. There are some seminaries out there that care more about social justice than they do about Jesus.

Fifth, buy books.

If you come to my house, you’ll find over 3,500 different books, on hundreds of topics, scattered...everywhere. Unfortunately, I’m old. I like the feel of a book in my hand when I’m reading or doing research.

But if I’m buying books, what should I look for? That’s a fair question, because there’s...ahem...garbage out there. In fact, a catalog from a what-was-once a Christian – now they’re called a “religious” – publishing house had a disturbing book in it: Wisdom From The Witch Of Endor: Four Rules for Living.

This author exalts the Witch of Endor as a noble person to learn from. God considers her a con-artist who's stealing money from hurting people, turning people away from God, and deserves to die. I don't know about you, but I'm probably never going to try to learn "wisdom" from a fraud... Just sayin'.

So, how do I avoid buying bad books? Well, let me give you some recommendations:

### **Commentaries**

Matthew Henry's Commentary

The Teacher's Bible Commentary by H. Franklin Paschall

Wiersbe Bible Commentary (2 Volume Set)

### **Other Books**

All the...in the Bible by Herbert Lockyer (Apostles, Prayers, Promises, Women, etc.)

Rose Handbooks (Bible Charts, Maps, Timelines, etc.) by Rose Publishing

Tyndale Bible Dictionary

Again, one final warning: take the words of ALL humans with a grain of salt. All of the writers of these books were humans...and humans can make mistakes.

So that's the short answer. Want more? Come on a field trip to my house, look through my library, ask questions – maybe even borrow some books – and then decide what you want from there!

## **Could / Should Christians vote for Democrats?**

Wow! Someone is trying to get me into trouble on my first question in this round! Yeesh! Okay, so let's charge into this headlong...and y'all can stone me for it later! So let me try to answer this as best as I can:

On the first night, as we discussed the Great Commission in Mark 16:15, we read this:

*And then he told them, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone."  
- Mark 16:15 (NLT)*

As we worked our way through it, I told you that the word for "world" is "kosmos" which means:

*κόσμος (kosmos)  
the world  
the universe  
worldly affairs  
the inhabitants of the world  
(Source: Strong's Concordance)*

I also told you:

*Understand, Jesus doesn't want this message just shared with the city, the state, or even the nation we live in. Jesus wants to make sure this message is told to everyone,*

*everywhere! In fact, this message should be so much a part of Jesus' Disciples, His followers – and that includes us, by the way – that it shapes their “worldly affairs”. Everything we do should be centered around this message. - Around The World Lesson 01: Introduction*

So when we talk about our faith, it needs to be so fundamental, so first in our thoughts, that we live our lives by it...and that includes voting in elections. But the first thing we need to realize is:

**You are NOT a “Democrat”, “Republican”, or anything else...  
you are a Christian!**

The one you need to be following is Christ in everything you do, and that includes politics.

Next, in our country we are given a remarkable privilege: we get to vote for the people who lead us. Not every country enjoys that privilege; and many are forced to live with tyranny, persecution, and death. Because of that, we get my second point here:

**As a Christian, you NEED to vote.**

God gave you this blessing; you need to take advantage of it!

Third, we need to take the candidates and compare what they say to God's Word. If the Bible is the standard for living, then the lives of those we elect to represent us should match what the Bible says.

- We don't just listen to their rhetoric – their words and promises – we should check out their lives, too! (By the way, the more they talk about “religion”, the more research I want to do on them to see if what they believe matches what I believe!)
- If they've been in office, we should check out their voting records to see if what they support matches what God says to support!

And here's another point:

**All Christians should do “due diligence” before voting!**

There are a number of Christian ministries that provide “scorecards” on candidates for where they stand on the issues. Read through different ones, evaluate the evidence, and then vote according to which candidate best matches the Bible.

In closing, let me say a few “shocking” statements:

- First, I have voted for Democrats when I became convinced by the available evidence that their views more closely aligned to the Bible than their opponents did.
- Second, while I appreciate living in a democracy and I DO vote in every election, I don't think either party is “God's party”. Both parties have flaws and, at times, I feel like it's not picking the best candidate, but deciding between the lesser of two evils...

- Finally, my hope for salvation has nothing to do with Washington D.C.

And with that...let the stoning begin!

### **Do I have to go back to those who hurt me?**

Wow! This question is...tough, so I'm going to try to be sensitive. If you're still bothered by this, it would be my honor to talk to you.

To help you understand what the Bible says, we have to describe two separate, important ideas:

#### **Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation**

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "forgive" means:

##### *Forgive*

*1: to cease to feel resentment against (an offender): pardon*

*2a: to give up resentment of or claim...for*

*b: to grant relief from payment of*

*(Source: Merriam-Webster.com)*

In other words, when I forgive, I give up my claim on them. I no longer want to seek vengeance, to see them hurt, or to want them to be punished. At the same time, I let go of my feelings of bitterness and resentment; the ones that are killing me...not them.

Forgiveness, by the way, can be done whether the other person admits they did anything wrong. Why? Because it's all about me. I forgive. I let them go. I let God become the judge. I give up the emotions that are crippling me. I give up the thoughts that are killing me.

In the end, forgiveness is about me because I'm the one who benefits.

Our other word is "reconciliation"; or, it's root word "reconcile". To "reconcile" means:

##### *Reconcile*

*1a: to restore to friendship or harmony*

*b: settle, resolve*

*(Source: Merriam-Webster.com)*

In other words, the relationship is mended, we're besties, and everything is perfect again!

So, which of these is Biblical? Actually, it may surprise you, but BOTH are! Now before you quit listening, let me explain to you exactly what the Bible does – and does not – say about these two topics.

The first place to check out is a command from Jesus in the Book of Matthew:

*"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if*

*you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. - Matthew 6:14-15 (NLT)*

This one is pretty straightforward: Jesus tells us that we NEED to forgive others. But remember that forgiveness is all about giving up our hurts, letting go of our pain, and letting God deal with the other person...not us. Because we benefit, why wouldn't we choose to do this?

More importantly, we need to consider what happens to us when we choose NOT to forgive! Not only does it hurt our relationships with others, not only does it take up space in our thoughts, and not only does it destroy our health, but it also hurts our relationship with God.

We're saying to God, "God! Forgive me, but I'm not going to forgive them! You don't realize how much they've offended me! You don't realize how much this hurt cost me! So, because You don't understand, forgive me...but I won't forgive them!"

How is that fair? Our sin hurt God, it destroyed our relationship with Him, and it cost Him the death of His Son, Jesus, to get us back. I think He understands. The question is, "Do we?"

There's a quote that I want to share with you here:

*"Forgiveness does not imply the other was really not so bad. Rather it suspends judgment and places the other in the hands of a merciful and just God. Because we are finite sinners, we are unable to judge another justly. Forgiveness does not declare the other person innocent. Instead it frees the forgiver from the heavy burden of having to be an ignorant, powerless and sinful judge." (Adney, 1995)*

We're commanded to forgive for our own sake and for the sake of our relationship with God. So we give up the person, the hurt, and the pain...and we let God deal with it, instead.

Now, are we ordered to take the next step and reconcile – to go back to a relationship – with the other person? I recently read a book on the subject and it was pure...garbage, actually. They argued that the Bible commands us to be reconciled with those who have hurt us.

But does it? Let's take a look at some other verses from a guy...named Jesus:

*"If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector. - Matthew 18:15-17 (NLT)*

Here, Jesus says that if someone sins against us and refuses to address it, we can walk away from the relationship! But how can that be if we're supposed to reconcile – to restore the relationship – with everyone who hurt us?

The simple answer? We do NOT have to reconcile...but we still have to forgive.

If you've been hurt by someone else, learn to forgive them. In my case, when learning to forgive, I had to learn an important phrase:

**If at first you don't forgive, try, try again!**

It took years. Why? Because I'm a bad Christian? Nope. Because I'm human...and the man hurt me badly. But when I was able to truly forgive him, all of the hurt went away. The nightmares that I had for years went away. I found that I wasn't spending my life replaying the events.

In the end, when I forgave him, I set myself free...not him. But, because he's unrepentant in his sin, I've never invited him over for coffee and cookies, either.

If you need to talk, please let me know!

### **How accurate are movies like "Left Behind", "Noah", "Exodus..."?**

Um... They occasionally get some stuff right. The movie "Noah" mentions a guy named...Noah. That's about it. Exodus talks about the plagues, but misses most of the rest of the story. If it's a major motion picture from Hollywood, assume that it probably isn't going to be incredibly accurate. Even movies like "Left Behind" show us what someone thinks the Bible says about the end times.

While these movies can be fun to watch, be sure that you're checking what they say happened with the Bible. Never take some human's word for it; take God's Word instead!

### **How did baptism come about?**

Baptism is "an outward sign of an inward faith". To be baptized is simply to say, "I believe in God, I confess that Jesus Christ is my Savior, and I believe that Jesus has taken my sins away." It is a way to show the world what you believe and to show God that you are following what He commanded:

*Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." - Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT)*

Jesus tells us to be baptized! John the Baptist told us to be – wait for it! - baptized! Baptism was common in both the Old and the New Testaments (the first and second halves of the Bible)! It's a very old tradition.

But, we need to remember that baptism is NOT about becoming a Christian, being saved, or anything else. It's simply following God's commands, setting an example for others ("See? I believe in Jesus!"), and reminding ourselves of what we claim to believe!

If you want to be baptized, let Pastor Barry know and he can arrange a time for it.

## How do I know what my spiritual gifts are?

If we're talking about spiritual gifts, the main verses we use are:

### **Romans 12:6-8**

- Prophecy
- Serving
- Teaching
- Encouraging
- Giving
- Leadership
- Showing Kindness (Mercy)

### **1 Corinthians 12:4-1, 28**

- Wise Advice
- Special Knowledge
- Great Faith
- Healing
- Miracles
- Prophecy
- Discernment
- Tongues
- Interpretation
- Apostles
- Helping Others

(Please note that there are others mentioned elsewhere, but these are the two main sections people refer to!)

Okay, so how do I know what my spiritual gifts are? The “easiest” way is to take a Spiritual Gift Inventory/Survey. (You can find these online.) You take a quiz and it matches you up with your spiritual gifts! Easy, right?

Actually...not so much. These are good guidelines, but they shouldn't be taken as “truth”. Why? Because your answers may depend on the way you're feeling that day. For example, a question on one survey is “I enjoy studying.” Well, in general I DO like studying; but if I just crammed for Finals, probably not so much.

Take these assessments with a grain of salt. While they can point you in the general direction of your gifts, they aren't the end-all and be-all of finding gifts.

Another way to find your gifts is to ask people who are spiritual leaders. Check in with them and see what they have to say about you. Again, take this with a grain of salt, because leaders may see one thing you did at church and miss the other 20 things you did in your community.

Finally, you can pray and ask God to show you your gifts. Since they're given by the Holy spirit – the Third Person in the Trinity – it's very easy for Him to reveal it to you.

But, if you want my suggestion, I would choose the “all of the above” approach. Take an inventory, then talk it over with a spiritual leaders, while you're praying that God will help you to understand how it works.

If you want an inventory, I did this one a few years back and liked it:

<https://s7d9.scene7.com/is/content/LifeWayChristianResources/Spiritual%5FGifts%5FAssessmentpdf.pdf>

Oh, and in closing, let me share a final quote from GotQuestions.org:

*Yes, God calls some to be teachers and gives them the gift of teaching. God calls some to be servants and blesses them with the gift of helps. However, specifically knowing our spiritual gift does not excuse us from serving God in areas outside our gifting. Is it beneficial to know what spiritual gift(s) God has given us? Of course it is. Is it wrong to focus so much on spiritual gifts that we miss other opportunities to serve God? Yes. If we are dedicated to being used by God, He will equip us with the spiritual gifts we need. (Source: GotQuestions.org)*

### **How do I live?**

I read this question and I really wasn't sure how to answer it. I thought about a long explanation, and maybe that's what you wanted. I thought about a scientific explanation, and maybe that's what you wanted. Instead of all of the other choices, though, I wanted to go for a simple one:

*In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. - Matthew 5:16 (NLT)*

We're to live our lives in such a way that when people look at how nice we are, how kind we are to others, how much we love those around us, how much we help those in need, they KNOW that there's something different about us! And, more importantly, those differences point people to God!

That's how we should live!

### **How do I rejoice always when I do not feel like I have anything to find joy in?**

Okay, there's some similar questions in this NDQ binder, but I feel it's different enough for us to jump into. One of the main verses to look at is:

*Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! - Philippians 4:4 (NLT)*

So how am I supposed to be “full of joy in the Lord” when I don't feel like I have anything? The answer this comes down to two simple words: Choose Joy!

I know a woman who went through pretty much the worst set of circumstances that I could imagine. Along the way, I asked her how she was doing, and she surprised me by saying she was, “Joyful!” When I asked her why she felt that way, she surprised me even more by saying, “I'm learning to choose joy each and every day.” And then she explained what she meant...

Every morning, she would read over a list of things that God had done for her the day before. Some were big, others are what most of us would call “trivial” or “unimportant”. But, no matter what it was, she wrote it down. Some examples included:

- Having a job.
- Having people who cared for her.

- Not being in the car when a tree branch smashed into it.
- Working with other Christians who supported her.

The list went on for pages and pages and pages! Now note that some of the things on her list were basic (having a job); while others were big (having people support her); while some were putting a positive spin on a bad situation (the tree branch). But each and every one of these was something she thanked God for!

In the mornings, she reviewed the list from the day before. In the evenings, she stopped and listed all of the things that God had done for her. (She carried a notebook to help her keep track of blessings throughout the day!)

In our world, it's very easy to focus on the negatives; the things we don't have, the things we want, or the ways we've been hurt. Choosing Joy is the process of acknowledging the hurts; while, at the same time, recognizing the blessings we have, too!

If you want to find joy, you need to choose it. So, starting today, get a notebook and look for the ways God blesses you in both big and small ways. (By the way, as I write this it's Summer and 80+ degrees outside, but there's a beautiful, cool breeze blowing in through the windows right now! I'm choosing joy by thanking God for giving me the breeze to offset the heat!)

### How do we pray to God and ask Him for healing or other things?

The verse that was given to me along with this question was Luke 22:42, which says:

*“Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.” - Luke 22:42 (NLT)*

Okay, so let's poke at this:

1. When in distress, Jesus cries out to God. If Jesus did it, we can do it, too!
2. Jesus states His request. We're allowed to ask!
3. Jesus asks for God to reveal His will. It's not about us, it's about God!

Most of us, fail at one of these three steps!

- First, there are people who don't want to “bother” God. Bother God? Omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (existing everywhere) God? How, exactly, do we bother Him by talking to Him?
- Second, we're afraid to ask for what we need. More importantly, we assume we already know the answer, so why bother, right? We need to keep in mind that when we ask something from God, there are three ways He can answer:
  - **Yes.** You've asked for something that's according to His will and His wisdom.
  - **No.** What you're asking for is selfish, opposed to God's will/plans, or He has something better to give. (I prayed that God would allow me to marry a woman that I was in love with,

and He said “no”. Looking back, I’m very, very thankful He said “no” because what He had planned was so much better than what I asked for!)

- **Wait.** Sometimes we think the answer is “no”, but God wants us to wait to see how His plans work out. During this time, since we didn’t get a definite “no”, we keep praying, keep focusing on God, and keep following Him. In this process, our own faith grows stronger as we lean on Him daily.
- Third, we ask for our will, not God’s. We become disappointed when He doesn’t do things our way; even if He has something better in mind! Or, we suffer and don’t see immediate relief; so we conclude that we’re flawed or God’s not listening.

When we pray for things, we make sure we pray to God, we ask for what we need (not what we want), and then we ask for Him to show us His will. In the specific case of healing, we ask God to comfort us; to build our faith; to help us to trust Him and to follow Him more closely – even if the answer to the healing is “no”.

Jesus KNEW what the plan was – He had agreed to it before the world even began (Revelation 13:8). He KNEW what was coming – He was God-in-flesh, so He knew the future. He KNEW about crucifixion before there WAS crucifixion (Deuteronomy 21:23 GRK Version).

Despite knowing what was coming, Jesus still asked for another way. But, in the end, He committed Himself to following God’s will in everything, no matter what came His way.

And that’s the way we need to pray!

### **How do you reforge a relationship with God after a family member’s death?**

This is a tough question because there are so many factors that go into it. For this document, I’m going to keep my answer...constrained.

The number one reason that relationship die is because of a lack of effective communication. Don’t believe me? Let me give you a couple of quick examples:

- Have you and a friend ever just “drifted apart”? It’s not that you ended the relationship; you just stopped talking to them. Communication...ended.
- Have you ever gotten into an argument with someone only to discover that either you or they – or both – had the wrong information? You were arguing over something that wasn’t even true! Why? Because the communication was ineffective.

Lack of effective communication separates us; and, ultimately, it isolates us. Instead of reaching out to another, we simply replay the voices in our heads...even the unhealthy ones. Satan wins when effective communication ends. It’s as simple as that.

So, what does this have to do with the question? How you reforge the relationship with God is by restarting the communication with Him. To do this, take the following steps:

1. Talk to Him. You can't communicate with someone if you don't...communicate with someone. (Sorry, this isn't all that profound.) Take time, pray to Him, talk to Him, find opportunities to spend time with Him.
2. Be honest. (Like you can fool God by lying to Him?) "God? I don't feel like you're listening!" It's a real comment. If you came up to me and said, "Barry. I don't feel like you're listening to me right now!", it would start a conversation. Being real with God jump starts conversations.
3. Confess your hurts. This goes along with being honest. Tell God why you're struggling. "God, how could You let that happen?" It's real. It's raw. It's honest. God is big enough to handle our hurts, our pain, our anger, and our fear if we will give it to Him!
4. Check your expectations. What do you want from a relationship with God? What should – "shoulds" are expectations – God do to/for you? Are they realistic? Are they appropriate to the situation? Finally, are they yours to enforce? More importantly, are you willing to let God be God, or do you have to be the one in control.
5. Finally, I guess I would pray the prayer of the father who asked Jesus to heal his son:

*"Have mercy on us and help us, if you can."*

*"What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes."*

*The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" - Mark 9:22b-24 (NLT)*

The man says, "Jesus! I have a little faith! It's not much! Help me have more faith!" And I think that's a good prayer to pray to God to restart the conversation.

In closing, this is a VERY short answer to a VERY big question! If you're still struggling, if there's more that you want to know, please reach out to...someone. This can be a Pastor, counselor, or even me, if you want. You don't have to walk this path alone!

### **How to decipher what God's voice is and when He's speaking to us.**

What a GREAT question! I believe God is speaking to us more than we're listening, by the way. To learn to listen, if you feel God is talking to you and/or prompting you to do something, here are some general guidelines to keep in mind:

You need to spend time in God's Word and in prayer, asking God to reveal His will for your life.

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. - Romans 12:2 (NLT)*

Next, anything God will tell you will NOT conflict with the Bible!

*Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. - Galatians 1:8 (NLT)*

Third, we need to test the message. To do this, check what they say – or what you feel – specifically against what the Bible says. When in doubt, find someone else to talk to and get their insight.

*Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. - 1 John 4:1 (NLT)*

Finally, try to take yourself out of the equation. The more I, personally, want something, the less likely it is from God, especially if the focus is on bringing me – not God – glory! (The more we rely on God, the easier it is to see His will.)

*So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God. I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved. - 1 Corinthians 10:31-33 (NLT)*

There's a TON more we could discuss, but this is a starting place. If you want more, please find me afterwards and we can dig deeper.

### **How do I find God's will for my life?**

I've been asked this a few times, but for some reason it's never made it into NDQ. However, I recently preached on it and, because of that, I wanted to take a moment and add it to the NDQ files! To answer this, let me share a "checklist" that you can follow:

#### Step 1: Pray

Ask God what He wants you to do and for His direction in your life. Pray for the people you think you want to serve and, at the same time, pray for yourself as you prepare to make a difference. In fact, pray like this through all of these steps!

#### Step 2: Check how you feel.

If you're angry or sad over a situation, or if working with people in some way brings you joy, it may be God calling you to get involved and make a difference. As you think about anger / sad / joy, it often helps to write down what you feel on paper. (Otherwise, it's just spinning around in your head.) Write out what about the situation makes you feel that way.

#### Step 3: Find a way to make a difference short-term.

Want to serve overseas? Find a short-term mission trip! Want to work with the homeless? Volunteer at a soup kitchen for an evening or a weekend. Most churches will let you volunteer in different ways, too!

Step 4: Re-check how you feel.

When you've done your ministry short-term, check how you feel. Does the situation still make you angry and sad for the injustice being done? Do you feel joy when you're doing something to help? At this point, also go back and review Step 2. Do you still have the same reasons for your feelings? If not, what changed?

Step 5: Seek outside advice.

If you still feel like this is what you should do, find someone who's already doing it and talk to them. Seek their advice. This could be a pastor, nurse, or missionary. Be sure to ask for HONESTY! Speaking as a Pastor AND a person, there's always parts of our ministry that we like better than others!

Step 6: Get others praying.

If you still feel like this is what you need to do, ask for prayer from others! There's not a single Christian out there who does their ministry "alone". We need God, first and foremost; and we need people surrounding us to help keep us accountable, encouraged, and advancing.

Step 7: Figure out what you need to learn.

If the Lord is still leading you in this way, what steps do you need to take to be ready? What are the things you need to do? (Maybe you need a public speaking class.) What are the things you need to learn? (Do they speak English or a foreign language?) Where are the places you need to train? (There's almost always a "school" somewhere that's teaching your style of ministry!) Where can you find the resources that you need? (Is it at a library? A school? The Internet? Just make sure you pick good resources!)

There's a TON more I could write here, but this is meant to get you started. If you need more, please ask!

**How do we know if God has told us "no" or to wait?**

Okay, the original question added: **Sometimes it's very clear. For instance, you don't get the job you wanted or someone else's offer on a house is accepted. Or for Sarah and Abraham, they had God's promise and it was clear they needed to wait. Often, though, it's vague.**

The first thing to know is that God ALWAYS answers prayer. The problem is that God answers in one of three ways:

Yes

This is pretty obvious. You prayed for a job and got it. You can stop praying over this now because God has said "yes".

No

This also tends to be pretty obvious. You prayed for a job and didn't get it. God shut the door. You can stop praying over this now because God has said "no". By the way, we can get frustrated when God says "no"; but the one thing that I've learned in all of my years of following God, though, is that He usually has a VERY good reason for saying "no".

### Wait

This final one is VERY vague, just like you said. You prayed for a job, but the position is still vacant a year later and you don't know what to do now. Is this a "no"? Or is God saying "wait" for some reason?

If God clearly hasn't said "no", the secret is to keep praying. In fact, my favorite response to "wait" comes from a man who knew how to pray: George Muller. Check this out:

*"The great point is never to give up until the answer comes. I have been praying for 63 years and 8 months for one man's conversion. He is not saved yet, but he will be. How can it be otherwise? I am praying." - George Müller*

If you're praying for something and God still hasn't answered it after 63 years and 8 months...the answer MIGHT be "no"...but keep praying, just to be sure!

### **How do we know we are doing what God wants us to do?**

This question requires a slightly...longer answer. Why? Because this is what the entire Bible is about! (It's also partially covered in the question, **"What does Jesus want us to understand? How does He want us to live? How do we follow Him?"**, so be sure to check that out, as well!)

So, let me hit the highlights. There are three "wills" that people ascribe to God:

#### Sovereign Will

God's Sovereign Will means that He can do whatever He wants. And, let's face it, if you can create a universe out of nothing, if you can speak and things come into existence, then God can pretty much do whatever He wants, right? Our theme verse is:

*The LORD does whatever pleases him throughout all heaven and earth, and on the seas and in their depths. – Psalm 135:6 (NLT)*

If you get time, read the rest of Psalm 135 because in it the Psalmist lists a bunch of things that God does by His Sovereign Will. So Sovereign Will is:

1. Found in the Bible. (We see God doing what He pleases.)
2. Based on whatever God wants to do. (Who can challenge Him or tell Him no?)
3. It's unknowable. (God doesn't have to reveal His will.)

But there ARE times when we see God's Sovereign Will:

1. God warns the prophets – the people He has chosen to speak for Him – ahead of time.
2. People experience it first-hand and realize it's God Sovereign Will after the fact.

This is why prophecy is so...difficult. If you ever encounter someone who claims to be a prophet, who claims to know God's Sovereign Will, and who gets it wrong, the Bible tells us to

put them to death. (Read Deuteronomy 18:17-22.) They're a false prophet! Because of this, we, as Christians, need to be careful who we listen to!

### Moral Will

God's Moral Will means that He gets to decide what's right and wrong. Unlike our confusing standards, God's are pretty simple: "right" is what God does/would do; "wrong" is what God doesn't/wouldn't do. Our theme verses for the Moral Will is Exodus 20:

*"You must not have any other god but me.*

*"You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea...*

*"You must not misuse the name of the LORD your God...*

*"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy...*

*"Honor your father and mother...*

*"You must not murder.*

*"You must not commit adultery.*

*"You must not steal.*

*"You must not testify falsely against your neighbor.*

*"You must not covet your neighbor's house...or anything else that belongs to your neighbor." – Exodus 20:3-17 (NLT – Edited)*

Any time God says, "Do this..." and we don't, it's a sin. God says "Honor your mother and father." If we choose NOT to honor them, it's a sin.

Any time God says, "Don't do this..." and we do it, it's a sin. God say, "Don't steal." How many of you have stolen something – either big or small? If you've stolen something, it's a sin.

God's Moral Will, by the way, is not confusing. God pretty much spells out EXACTLY how His followers should act! The reason there's debate is because we want to find ways to justify our private sins or to condemn others for their sins. It's as simple as that.

### Individual Will

The final "will" of God is one that most Christians stress over: Individual Will. We believe that there are set steps, crafted by God, that we need to somehow figure out. Don't believe me?

- What if I marry the wrong person? God's Individual Will says that there's one – and only one – person who I need to marry; so how do I determine if the person in front of me is “the one”, or if I need to keep looking? Any of you ever struggled with that?
- What if I choose the wrong job? What if I was meant to be a Pastor and I became a successful business owner instead? Any of you worried about that?

There are two things that are funny about this view:

- First, we act as if we, somehow, have the ability to screw up God's plans! “God? I was supposed to marry this person, but I married that person, instead! Now I've screwed up all of Your plans! You wanted me here, I went there, and now You're left scrambling to try to make all of this work! I'm sorry that I messed up Your plans!”

How many of you think that you have that much power? You don't. God knows EXACTLY what we will choose, before we even choose it! He's never caught off guard by what we do. He may – and can – disapprove; but He's never surprised.

- Second, I have a challenge for you: read your Bible and find out how many times the Individual Will of God is mentioned. More importantly, bear in mind that EVERY choice in the Individual Will needs to be mapped out, so look for where God has a detailed plan that includes what to eat for breakfast, how fast to drive to work, how many copies you need to make of that document, whether you forward that meme, etc.

The exact sum total you will find for an Individual Will is...none.

With all that, let's revisit the question one more time. How do we know what God wants us to do? There's only two things to keep in mind:

1. We go back to The Greatest Commandment:

*Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” – Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT)*

We love God first. We love others second. God commands that both in the Old and New Testament.

2. We check God's Moral Will. If God says “do”, we do it. If God says “don't”, we don't.

The rest we leave up to wisdom. In fact, in closing, let me share one more verse with you:

*If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. – James 1:5 (NLT)*

If you want more of an answer on this, please ask!

### **How does God define us?**

Okay, you have to know that this is usually a half-hour conversation! Why? Because this is something critical for ALL Christians to not only know, but believe! (Most of us have heard the words, but the words haven't changed us!)

To do, this, you need to turn to John 1:12:

*But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. - John 1:12 (NLT)*

So, how does God define us? If we've believed in Him, if we've asked Him to be our Savior, then we are His child! What does this mean?

Gals! You are a "princess", because you're the Daughter of the King! Don't let anyone treat you as less than who God calls you to be!

Guys! You are a "prince", because you're the Son of the King! Don't let anyone treat you as less than who God calls you to be!

In addition to that, we get a LOT of other definitions, as well! If you get time, go check out:

1. I am a child of God. (John 1:12, Galatians 4:4-7)
2. I am an heir with Christ. (Romans 8:15-17)
3. I have been bought with a price. (1 Corinthians 6:20)
4. I am God's delight. (Zephaniah 3:17)
5. I cannot be separated from God. (Romans 8:35-39)
6. I can do all things through Christ. (Philippians 4:13)
7. I am someone worth dying for. (John 3:16)
8. I am loved. (1 Thessalonians 1:14)
9. I am chosen. (1 Peter 2:9)
10. I am saved by grace, not by works. (Ephesians 2:8-9)
11. I am forgiven. (1 John 1:9)
12. I am never alone. (Isaiah 43:2 – 3a)
13. I am valued. (Matthew 10:29 – 31)
14. I have a spirit of power, love and self-discipline (2 Tim.1:7)

### **How does God love me after all of the big, terrible, heavy sins?**

Before we answer this, I want to show you some of the "role-models of faith" in the Bible:

- King David is called a "man after God's own heart". (1 Samuel 13:14) This, despite the fact that he committed adultery – slept with another man's wife – and had a bunch of men killed to cover it up! (2 Samuel 11)

- Paul is considered the “Apostle to the Gentiles”. (1 Corinthians 15:9) Of course, he started his professional career by arresting and killing Christians. (Acts 8:1, Acts 9:1-2)
- Peter is the “rock” upon which Jesus will build his church. (Matthew 16:18) Surprisingly, this “rock” turns around and denies that he even knows who Jesus is! (Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75)

If you want more recent examples:

- I have a good friend who was a drug-runner with warrants in multiple states and who now is a speaker who comes to this Camp.
- I was sitting in the seminar of a man who used to be connected to the mafia in Chicago. He had blood on his hands from some of his choices. Now, after serving his time, he was a Pastor working with troubled teens and trying to keep them from following his path.
- Or, if you don’t mind me getting personal, you have me – a guy who made plans to kill a guy AFTER he was a Christian.

So, keeping these stories in mind, what would you consider “big, terrible, heavy sins”?

Please understand, I’m NOT making fun of this question! Quite the opposite, actually! I want you to realize that all of us who follow God – kings, apostles, disciples, pastors – have a past! We’ve all made mistakes! We’ve all sinned...just like you.

But God still loves us! Why? Well, because of two reasons:

- First, because God IS love! It’s His nature; it’s the way He acts. God loves us because of who He is, plain and simple.
- Second, God loves us because He made us, He knows us, He wants what’s best for us! Please understand, that God WILL allow us to walk away from Him; and we can walk away from Him for all of eternity, if we choose to! God gives us that right! However, because we’re all God’s creation, He wanted to make a way for us to come back to Him; to return to the relationship with Him that we’ve thrown away by our choices.

God chose to send His Son, Jesus, to die in our place; to pay for our sins! Then, Jesus rose from the dead to prove that He COULD take away our sins! And if we believe in Jesus, if we ask to be forgiven, then God DOES forgive us!

Please know two things in closing:

- First, there is no such thing as a sin that’s “too big” for God to forgive!
- Second, if you HAVE asked God to forgive you but you’re still struggling with guilt over your choices, then you might want to learn to forgive yourself! God isn’t bringing back up your past sins...so why are you?

If you want more information on this, please let me know!

### **How would the revelation of NHI (Non-Human Intelligences) change your views on Christianity?**

Okay, this is officially the first time I think I've EVER been asked this question! It's not the first time I've thought about it, but I finally get to put my thoughts down on paper! (Yay!) To answer this, let's go to the very beginning:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. - Genesis 1:1-2 (NLT)*

Here's the deal: what did God create? "The heavens and the earth", right? Then, going from a macro-cosmic (very large) view, the story shifts to God's work on earth. But, do you see what's missing? Any explanation of what God does anywhere else in the universe!

Does this mean that God created life elsewhere? Nope. Does it mean that He didn't create life elsewhere? Nope. It just means that the focus of the story – and the most relevant part for us – is how God created the Earth.

Here's the kicker, though: we DO know that there are other forms of life "out there". Do you want to know where we find them? The Bible! Check out these verses:

Genesis 3:24:	Cherubim
Genesis 6:4:	Nephillim
Isaiah 6:2-7:	Seraphim
John 8:44:	Satan
Mark 5:9:	Demons
1 Thess. 4:16:	Archangels

In fact, Job 1:6 tells us that there's a "heavenly court".

So, what would it do to my faith? Pretty much nothing at all... Why? Because I think the universe God created is bigger, wilder, and more awesome than we can ever imagine! (Oh, and I'd ask for a tour of the universe in their spaceship!)

### **I sinned in my younger days when I wasn't following God, going to church, and I've forgotten sins I've done. How do I ask for forgiveness for those sins?**

Believe it or not, I used to stress over this – a lot! What if I missed a sin and then God would judge me for it! It didn't help that I read the Book of Job when I was younger. Check this out:

*Job's sons would take turns preparing feasts in their homes, and they would also invite their three sisters to celebrate with them. When these celebrations ended—sometimes after several days—Job would purify his children. He would get up early in the morning*

*and offer a burnt offering for each of them. For Job said to himself, “Perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their hearts.” This was Job’s regular practice. - Job 1:4-5 (NLT)*

Boy! Talk about a guilt trip! Job is offering sacrifices for sins that his children MIGHT have committed! I thought I was doing a pretty good job just trying to remember all of the times I actually DID sin on any given day!

So, what do we do with this? Well, instead of hanging out with Job, why don’t we go to a guy named Paul in the New Testament:

*We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. - Colossians 1:11-14 (NLT)*

In the Greek, verse 14 is slightly different:

*In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. - Colossians 1:14 (GRK)*

The Greek word for “we have” is “ἔχομεν” (echomen). It’s a Present-Indicative-Active Verb. In other words, it means that the action – we’ve been redeemed – is active now. In other words, we ARE redeemed, we HAVE forgiveness.

It’s not about confessing EVERY sin – that’s a works-based idea – but, instead, it’s our faith in Jesus Christ that saves us. Jesus has already paid the penalty for our sins – all of them – and we just need to believe in Him and receive the gift He offers.

### **If Christianity is true, then why do people leave it?**

Wow! Great question! While we can never really know for sure why someone does or doesn’t do something, we can use their words to try to get to the real meaning. If I had to pick the top five reasons why people leave Christianity, they would include (in no particular order):

#### *1. It wasn’t their faith.*

I went to church with my folks for many, many years. I sat in the pews, read my Bible, prayed, and sang the hymns. I did everything that was expected of me. Unfortunately, the only reason I did those things is because I was told to; not because I believed in God. And some of you are in the same boat, by the way!

For me, the change came when I actually began to look into God for myself and, when I was convinced, I asked God to forgive me and to be in charge of my life. At that point, it was MY faith.

#### *2. They ran into the wrong “Christians”.*

Just because someone claims to be a Christian, doesn't mean they are. Just because someone claims that they follow Christ, doesn't mean that they do. And just because we call it a "church", doesn't mean that it's always doing what God wants them to do.

Many people have given up on Christianity because of the flaws in humans; not because of God. We look at people who are judgmental, hypocritical, or just plain mean. Because these people claimed that they were "religious", we decided that religion wasn't for us.

3. *They had the wrong expectations for God.*

If I think that God is going to always give me tons of money – and a pony! - and He doesn't, how am I going to feel? Hurt? Angry? Because I expected the wrong thing and God didn't give me what I WANTED, I may choose to walk away.

By the way, I gave you kind of a silly example of this above; but let's get real. I know of people who walked away from God because of the death of their child, the fact that they have cancer, or some other serious reason. The sad thing is that they walked away from God at the time that He most wanted to wrap His arms around them and hold them. They didn't get what they wanted, and so they walked away.

4. *They relied on others to have a relationship with God, not themselves.*

I have a friend who describes this idea:

*Suppose I invite you over for a steak dinner. Now, I'm wonderful at grilling out and, this time, I have gotten my hands on the PERFECT slab of meat! Not only that, but I'm going to season it just right! Then, I'm going to set the grill to the right temperature and cook it so that it's soft and juicy. After I take it off the grill, I'm going to put it on the plate along with some other tasty food. Then, because you're my guest, I'm going to reach over and cut your steak into perfect, bite-sized pieces so that you don't have to go to any work; it's all been done for you. As you pick up your fork, I reach back over, pick up a piece of meat, and then pop it into my mouth. I chew for a few minutes and then I take this piece of meat, stick it on your fork and wait for you to enjoy it! (Thanks Jack for this wonderful – and icky! – illustration!)*

How many of you are grossed out by that thought? Well, then why do we wait for other people to take God's Word, the Bible, to prepare it, process it, and then give us the pieces that they think we need when we can be reading it for ourselves? (By the way, NEVER take my word for things; take God's Word for it, instead!)

5. *They refused to ask questions.*

I think scientists are brilliant and I love hanging out with them! I also think that they're humans and they can make human mistakes. When a scientist tells me the earth evolved, I ask for proof; just like I ask for proof when someone tells me that Jesus rose from the dead!

I don't want to hear someone's IDEAS of what happened, I want to KNOW what happened! So I ask questions, I challenge them, and I do the research! (This includes reading people who have different views on the subject!) Why? Because if I'm going to believe something, it won't be because a human told me it's true; it will be because I took the time to find out for myself.

Obviously there are many other reasons. These were ones that I've dealt with recently and so they fit well with this question. If you're thinking of walking away, I'd love to sit down with you and have you share with me what changed in your life. I promise to listen!

### **If God dislikes routine why do we have so much routine in church?**

All right, I'm legitimately stumped on this one. Mostly because I can't think of any verses where God says, "I hate routines!" The best I can come up with is:

*And so the Lord says, "These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote." - Isaiah 29:13 (NLT)*

In this passage, God isn't condemning rituals or routines. He's condemning the fact that Israel is simply "going through the motions"; they don't actually mean – or care about – what they're saying!

Let me give you an example that may help you out. When I was young, we were taught a bedtime prayer:

*Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

Every night, before bed, we would say that prayer. I've probably said it thousands of times in my lifetime. Do you know how many times I meant it? Very, very few. Why? Well:

- When I was very young, I said the words because I was told to say them...and so I did. I didn't mean them; I really didn't even understand them!
- When I was old enough to understand them, I wasn't a Christian yet, so this was simply a ritual before bed; nothing more or less to me than brushing my teeth.
- When I became a Christian and said these words, I started thinking about them...and wondering why I was taught such a depressing prayer as a small child! (If you hang out with me, you'll hear me ask this question over and over again: "Why are we teaching this to children?")
- I still occasionally say this prayer, but now that I truly understand what my Savior has done for me, I can say the words simply, honestly, and earnestly. Why? Because death is more probable at my age than it was before, and I can't wait to spend eternity with God in Heaven!

God isn't opposed to routine. Instead, He's opposed to routine for routine's sake; especially when the routines distract you from the relationship you're supposed to have with Him!

P.S. If there's another verse you're thinking of, be sure to let me know!

### **If I follow God and I have a bad addiction, does he repent or hate me?**

Simple answer: No! God loves us...always. He doesn't approve of our sins, but He loves us!

So, where do we go to find that in the Bible? Let's start with Paul – the guy who wrote most of the New Testament:

*And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.*

*I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. - Romans 7:18-25 (NLT)*

Paul says that he struggles to follow Jesus and he gets it wrong. If Paul gets it wrong, it gives me hope! Why? Because God doesn't give up on Paul when he sins, and He won't give up on us, either!

Now, what do we do about our addictions? That's another set of verses from Paul:

*Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. - 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NLT)*

In this passage, Paul is talking about sexual sins, but he says, “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit”. Because we have the Holy Spirit – the third Person of the Trinity – living inside of us, we **need** to respect our bodies; and that includes overcoming addictions.

I recommend that you talk to someone and get help if you're struggling. There are TONS of resources, support groups, tips and tricks, and other tools that can help you with any and every addiction. You just need to be willing to ask for help.

But, to bring it back around, an addiction doesn't mean that God hates you.

### **If I'm already baptized, can I get baptized again?**

This question takes me into a “gray area”. What do I mean? Well, the Bible never specifically says you **can** get baptized again. It also doesn't specifically say you **can't** get baptized again, either.

I do know a man who asked to be re-baptized. He started out as a Christian, was baptized, and then began to fall away. (He stopped living like a Christian.) After a while, he felt bad, gave his life to Christ again, and asked to be baptized again because he wanted to be serious this time.

So, can you be baptized again? It's up to you to decide if you want to or not.

### **If I've given my life to Christ but still struggle with self-harm, am I still saved even if I'm struggling with a major sin?**

Thank you so much for being brave enough to ask this question! I don't know your story, but I want to give you hope in this answer! So let's dig in, and to answer this, I want to do it in reverse:

#### "A Major Sin"

Self-harm isn't actually a "sin". In the Bible, you won't find a commandment saying, "Thou shalt not cut!" So you need to get rid of the shame of thinking that this is "a major sin". (Shame traps you in a behavior, and God loves you WAY too much to see you "stuck" in your past!)

What is self-harm? Self-harm happens when people can't cope with what's happened to them in their lives. It could be abuse, neglect, loss of a loved one, or any other "critical event".<sup>1</sup> When we experience something we can't heal from, we're left with trying to "cope" instead. ("Coping" and "healing" are NOT the same thing.)

Some ways we cope are positive. We light a candle on a loved one's birthday to remember them. We seek counseling to work through the abuse. We build a network of friends to support us so that we don't feel neglected or alone.

Some ways we cope are negative. We remain stuck in our grief. We refuse to acknowledge, let alone deal, with the abuse we've been through. We are alone due to neglect, so we choose to remain alone.

Self-harm is a form of coping that IS negative. I've used it. I hurt myself so that I didn't have to feel. The physical pain canceled out the emotional pain. You want to know what I learned by doing that? That eventually the physical pain stops and the emotional pain comes flooding back in.

The only way to deal with the emotional pain is to actually deal with what caused it in the first place. For me, I had to revisit memories that I didn't want to think about. I had to look at the choices of others. I had to even look at my own choices. It was hard work and more than once I wanted to quit; to go back to "covering" pain.

I want you to know that after I did the work, though, the past didn't hurt. I can think of the abuse I experienced without anger or sadness. Yes, it happened. However, the ghosts of the past have no hold on me now. I can become who God made me to be.

#### "Am I Still Saved"

The next part of your question was "am I still saved"? Yes! Undoubtedly, unequivocally, yes! Just because you're trying to cope with pain – or, for some people, you're actually just trying to

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<sup>1</sup> In our *Trek* program, Maria and I call them "critical events" instead of "trauma". Why? Because the world defines trauma in a specific way! If you go through a terrible experience, people may look at it and say, "That wasn't traumatic!" A critical event, on the other hand is something that is traumatic to you!

feel...anything! – doesn't make you less of a Christian!

What I want you to know first is how God views you:

*But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. - John 1:12 (NLT)*

You are God's child, and He loves you very much. He wants what's best for you; and self-harm isn't what's best. Because of that, I want to encourage you to talk to your Heavenly Father and tell Him about your struggles and ask Him to help you.

Next, I want to show you what God promises you:

*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. - Romans 8:28 (NLT)*

Notice that we're not promised that we will only get anything good. Instead we're promised that if we give everything to God – including the pain we're going through – He will take it and make something good out of it.

And that's a promise that God has kept in my life! Let me give you two examples:

First, my friend, Beck, worked at Camp with me. One summer, her parents filed for a divorce. Hurt, she came to talk to me. After listening, I pointed her to this verse in Romans 8. She looked at me and said, "How can God make ANYTHING good come out of this?"

At that moment, a camper came into the hallway, looking very upset. I asked them what was wrong, and they said, "My parents told me before I came to Camp that they were getting a divorce. Why would God allow that? Is there anyone that I can talk to about it?"

And Beck, my hero, turned to me, and said, "Shut up!" She then looked at the boy and said, "I can't tell you why God would allow it, but my parents are getting a divorce, too. I would love to talk to you about it, if I can." And the two of them went off together.

In that time, in that place, there was exactly ONE person on the entire Camp who could even begin to understand what this young man was going through...and it required Beck to experience pain so that she could understand the pain of another.

In my own life, I've spent a lot of time being mad at God for letting me be molested as a child. I just couldn't understand why God didn't protect me. Then, one night, I was working with a camper who was out of control. I was ready to yell at him when out of my mouth came, "Who molested you?"

The young man looked at me and said, "How did you know?"

I looked back and said, "Because I was molested, too." The boy burst into tears and we had a long talk because I could understand the pain he was in.

Now, I would NEVER wish for someone to go through pain! But I do know that when I gave my pain to God, He used it to help me help others. I would never wish my past on another human...but I'm grateful to God for what I've been through, because I couldn't do what I do without it.

Maybe, in time, you can reach that point, too. You just have to be willing to give your pain to God...and leave it with God.

#### "Struggle With Self-Harm"

Okay, I really hope this is the way you meant to say this! Why? Because of one of my favorite parts of the Bible: The Do-Do Passage:

*And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. - Romans 7:18-20 (NLT)*

Paul says, "I'm trying to do the right thing...but I fail! I'm trying to not mess up...but I do anyhow!" (In Paul's case, though, it's his desires and sins that he's fighting against.)

If you're "struggling" with self-harm, it's actually a good thing. Does that sound odd? It's because you're fighting to NOT do it! I know a young man whose arms are covered with heavy scars because for years he didn't fight back; he just gave in!

If you're struggling with it, then it means you can get help! You don't have to walk through life alone; there are others who are more than willing to walk beside you! Find a Pastor, counselor, or trusted friend! Don't try to get through life alone, especially when you don't have to!

Even better, check this out:

*Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. - 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)*

You want someone else who will walk through life with you? God will! He wants you to turn to Him, to talk to Him, and to curl up in His lap and tell Him about your worries, your cares, and your struggles. (Some of my best days were when I stopped trying to be "strong", broke down, and cried out to God!)

#### "Given My Life To Christ"

All right, here's the last section. To address this, I need to ask you a very real, very tough question:

#### **You gave your life to Christ, but did you give all of it?**

Do you give Him your hurts? Did you give Him your pain? Did you hold onto bitterness, shame, or regret? Did you say, "God? I give you all of me!"? Or, did you say, "God? I give you this part of my life...but I'm holding onto this!"?

Please understand that I am NOT judging you! I'm just trying to help you to understand that God wants you to give Him ALL of your life, not just parts of it.

Today, right now, why don't you give Him the parts that you're holding onto? More importantly, why don't you give it to Him and then ask that He keep it safe...even from you?

Please know that other have gone down this road, too. I don't know why you self-harm, but I do know what it's like to feel so overwhelmed that it seems like the only option. God helped me to change. He will help you to change, too, if you want!

If I can help you in ANY way, please let me know!

### **If there is not consequence for using drugs (e.g. marijuana), why is it a sin?**

Okay, I'm not sure how to answer this one because I'm not sure what's being asked. First, there ARE legal consequences for possessing, using, or distributing drugs. Second, there ARE physical consequences for using drugs – even supposedly “safe” drugs like marijuana!

For the legal consequences, we're told in Romans 13:

*Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. The authorities are God's servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God's servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience. - Romans 13:1-5 (NLT)*

In other words, if it's illegal – and not in conflict with God's laws – we need to obey the authorities God has placed over us. (If society says it's illegal to be a Christian, that IS in conflict with God's laws, and I have to follow God, not man!)

As for the physical consequences, we're told in 1 Corinthians 6:

*Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NLT)*

Now I KNOW that this is talking about sexual sins, but I think it IS still relevant. (Unlike my answer to “Are tattoos okay?”. The reason I say this is because tattoos are external and reasonably harmless. Drugs, on the other hand, actively KILL the body!) If I'm taking drugs and harming my body, am I honoring God by doing it? Nope.

Finally, let's look at one other passage. Check out Matthew 22:

*“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?”*

*Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” - Matthew 22:36-38 (NLT)*

How do I love God with all of my heart when I'm using drugs to mess with my mind? How do I have real conversations with God when I'm using chemicals to try to numb the pain? The answer is: I can't.

Even more than that, when has sitting stoned on the couch ever been something that allowed me to show love to my neighbor? Or, could I show love to my neighbor by keeping my mind and body clean, focusing on God, and helping them?

### **If we have free will why does God sometimes intervene? Wouldn't it then be not free will if God chooses?**

Wow! We are NOT shying away from some VERY tough questions! This is the reason that I love to work with students more than adults – you ask the questions you want to know the answers to! Unfortunately, to answer this, I probably should do a whole series on it... For now, though, we'll try for a quick answer in the time we've got and see where it goes.

If you get a moment, go look up the question, “If God created us with a future from our beginning, why would He plan for most of the world to go to Hell?” Why? Because, for Calvinists, there is no such thing as “Free Will”. If God wants something, He does it; if God wants you saved, you will be; if God doesn't want you saved, you won't be. No decision you make is anything other than what you are allowed to make by a Holy God. On the bright side, for a modern Calvinist, the answer is simple: “There Is No Free Will”. (Makes me wish we were all Calvinists and I could be done right now...)

But what about non-Calvinists like me? Well, that requires something else...

To make this make sense, let's take a look in the Bible at some of the times where God “intervenes” and decide if it's something that's acceptable or not:

#### Scenario One: Choices and Consequences

If you have your Bibles, read Genesis 3 for some background on this story. To sum it up, however, you need to know that Adam and Eve are created by God, they are placed in the Garden of Eden, and they are given a choice: follow God and spend eternity in paradise with Him; or disobey – exercise your free will – suffer, and then eventually die. (Guess which one they chose!)

Does God allow them the free will to choose? Yes. Do they choose to ignore God? Yes. However, there is an act of grace immediately here – God does NOT have them die! Instead, God tells them that life is about to get very, very hard. And then, in verse 23, we find this:

*So the LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to*

*cultivate the ground from which he had been made. After sending them out, the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. - Genesis 3:23-24 (NLT)*

God allows the humans to choose their actions, but not their consequences. God is sovereign – which is a fancy word that means God is “an acknowledged leader, one possessing or held to possess supreme authority”. In other words, it’s God’s rules – not ours – that we need to follow. God will let us choose poorly, but we don’t get to escape the consequences of the choices we make. Is that a violation of our free will? Nope, because it’s still His world.

#### Scenario Two: Following or Not Following

Throughout the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is given a simple choice: follow God or not follow God; either do what God says or...don’t. It really was that simple. But, like with Adam and Eve, the choice has a consequence! If the Israelites choose to then turn away from God, they faced consequences. God even reminds Solomon of that in 2 Chronicles 7:

*At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or command grasshoppers to devour your crops, or send plagues among you. Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. - 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 (NLT)*

The sad thing is that EVERY time Israel turned away, they faced drought, slavery, famine, war, disease, suffering, and death. When it hurt bad enough, then they would come running back to God! After a time, when life became comfortable again, they would walk away again. Unfortunately, we get the same choice that Israel had. How are you doing with that?

God never forces anyone – not Israel, not America, not us – to follow Him! He DOES warn us that doing life alone is miserable, overwhelming, painful, and filled with suffering. It’s still our choice, our free will, to decide to follow God or walk away; just like it was Israel’s. Again, we get to choose our actions...not the consequences for them.

#### Scenario Three: Healed or Not Healed

Please flip over to Mark 6 in your Bible. As you’re going there, let me explain the story. Jesus has begun his ministry and lives are being changed! He casts out demons, He heals the sick, He teaches and preaches. Amazing stuff, right? Then Jesus goes to His hometown of Nazareth... Skip down to halfway through verse 2:

*They asked, “Where did he get all this wisdom and the power to perform such miracles?” Then they scoffed, “He’s just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us.” They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him... And because of their unbelief, he couldn’t do any miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. - Mark 6:2b-3, 5 (NLT)*

Death and disease weren't part of God's plan, they're the consequences of the Fall way back in Genesis 3! Most people – I guess I can't say "all" - don't deliberately try to get sick; it's not a choice that they make. Based on that, any time that Jesus heals someone, it's NOT a violation of their free will, because they didn't "choose" the state of being ill to begin with!

But, despite the fact that Jesus COULD have healed a lot of people in and around Nazareth, the fact that they didn't want Him to meant that He didn't force healing on people! In other words, Jesus COULD have forced everyone to be healthy, but He respected their right to choose NOT to be healed! He took care of those who wanted it, but let the others choose their own way.

This is free will in action again! Even though the outcome – healing – would have been greater than suffering, God through Jesus allowed them to keep on suffering, if that's what they preferred. (He allow us to hold onto our suffering, too, if we choose to not give it to Him. Free will still operates today!)

#### Scenario Four: To Force or Not to Force

In the first three, it's fairly obvious to see that free will is allowed by God. We never get to choose the consequences, but we DO get to choose how much suffering and pain we want to hold onto in our lives.

Now, however, I want to deal with one of the rare instances where it looks like God DOES override free will:

*But I will make Pharaoh's heart stubborn so I can multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. Even then Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you. So I will bring down my fist on Egypt. Then I will rescue my forces—my people, the Israelites—from the land of Egypt with great acts of judgment. - Exodus 7:3-4 (NLT)*

Okay, in this case, it clearly seems that God is canceling out Pharaoh's ability to choose. In other words, if this is to be taken literally – and out of context – then God takes away free will. But, does He?

The first question we need to ask is: How innocent is Pharaoh in this story? Well, Pharaoh has enslaved a nation, brutally oppressed them, doesn't care if they live or die, etc. In fact, we're not told if it's this Pharaoh or another one who orders all of the baby boys slaughtered. Based on this, what would be the likelihood of him simply letting the Israelites go just because Moses tells him that God wants him to? Not much...

The second question we need to ask is: How impressed is Pharaoh by the first few miracles that Moses and Aaron do by God's power? (Remember: their rods became serpents and they turn water to blood.) Not much. Why? Because even though these were done on a larger scale, his "magicians" could also do them; and so he was unwilling to see the hand of God in those moments. Again, if we skip down to verse 22b, we see:

*So Pharaoh's heart remained hard. He refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the*

*LORD had predicted. Pharaoh returned to his palace and put the whole thing out of his mind. - Exodus 7:22b-23 (NLT)*

Pharaoh's attitude toward the whole thing? Meh. He simply doesn't care. More to the point, he doesn't care that his people are suffering because of his choices. We can see that more if we flip over to Exodus 8:

*But when Pharaoh saw that relief had come, he became stubborn. He refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had predicted. - Exodus 8:15 (NLT)*

This time, the plague of frogs bothers him, personally, and Pharaoh asks for relief. When relief comes, he decides that he simply doesn't need to care anymore; the plague wasn't bothering him anymore so he, Pharaoh himself, chooses not to honor his agreements. That choice was done of his own free will, not because God hardened his heart!

In the end, Pharaoh doesn't value his people, he doesn't value those he's using as slaves, he doesn't value God or "gods"; he simply doesn't care...until his own comfort is threatened and, finally, when his own son dies in Exodus 12. When it affects him, then it matters to him.

So, does God take away Pharaoh's free will? Actually, the answer is "kind of...ish". (Weird, right?) In Hebrew, the phrase "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" (Exodus 9:12) literally means "God strengthened Pharaoh's resolve". In other words, Pharaoh was already heading in this direction...and God encourages him to keep right on going!

In fact, one Hebrew commentary I read said that God withdrew His Spirit from Pharaoh. In other words, God was no longer encouraging Pharaoh to change. Instead, all that Pharaoh was left with was his own selfish, flawed, frail spirit to use to make decisions. (Not sure I agree with that, but it IS an interesting point!)

Pharaoh isn't a nice, totally innocent person; someone who would have absolutely freed the slaves if he was just asked nicely! He's not the "good guy" in this story, no matter what God may or may not have done. Instead, God KNEW that Pharaoh wouldn't listen, which is why he gave Moses the miraculous signs to begin with!

God also knew that Pharaoh wouldn't give up the slaves even after the plagues began! So, God hardened Pharaoh's heart – He "strengthened Pharaoh's resolve" – so the final part of the story could be played out fully: It wasn't enough that the Israelites escaped as beggars to die poor, wretched, and starving in the wilderness; God wanted them to be freed, to be prosperous, and to be an example to all of the nations of what God does both to those who He loves and to those who oppose Him.

Is that fair? Whether we like it or not, the answer is yes... Pharaoh made the choice multiple times on his own; God simply made Pharaoh continue on that path to the very end. Then Pharaoh and all of Egypt had to face the consequences for their choices.

**If we're doing our best to live a godly life and we suffer from medical issues and such, does it mean we're being punished for something, or it an obstacle to make us**

## stronger?

Okay, short answer is...maybe-ish to both? Is that good enough? Probably not! Well, to answer this better, let me show you a couple of passages from the Bible. The first comes from Hebrews:

*As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?*

*For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. - Hebrews 12:7-11 (NLT)*

These verses show us that God DOES discipline us when we make a mistake. But, the key word to notice is that it's "discipline", not "punishment". For us:

**Discipline is correcting someone in love.  
Punishment is hurting someone in anger.**

God looks at us when we're making a mistake, and He corrects us. He wants us to be better, so He let's us know that we can be better... And while this isn't always pleasant – Believe me! I know from personal experience! – but when I've learned the lesson God had for me, when I've changed, I'm always grateful to God for teaching me.

Now, before you think that this is all cut-and-dried and the answer is done, we need to look at one more part of the Bible; this one found in 2 Corinthians:

*If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.*

*Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. - 2 Corinthians 12:6-10 (NLT)*

Paul is the one speaking here. THE "Paul"! The guy who wrote a big chunk of the New Testament; the guy who started a TON of churches; the guy who calls being shipwrecked and beaten "a light affliction"! THAT Paul!

Paul says, “To keep me from becoming proud, God allowed Satan to give me a ‘thorn in my flesh’”. Notice that we’re never told what the “thorn” is; we just know that it causes Paul a lot of tears because he actually “begs” for God to take it away. But what happens? God doesn’t take it away!

So Paul heals others, he casts out demons, and he both sees and does a lot of miracles....and yet he can’t heal himself. Why? Because God allows Paul to have a problem in his life. And notice what Paul does about it:

- First, he prays to God. By the way, since he’s begging God to get rid of it, assume that this is a long, emotional prayer.
- Second, he prays to God...again. (See notes on his first prayer!)
- Third, he prays to God...again. (See notes on his first prayer!)
- Finally, Paul realizes that the pain he’s going through is making him talk to God more and he says, “You know what God? That’s all right! Let me keep the pain because every time I hurt, I spend more time talking with You!”

So, in this case, Paul experiences pain in his life...and it helps him to build his relationship with God!

Pain is a part of being human; it’s the consequence of humans choosing to sin way back in the Garden of Eden. Sometimes God uses it to discipline us when we’re making mistakes; other times it’s just part of living in a fallen world. However, what we DO with pain, with sickness, with struggles is up to us. Really, there are two options:

**Pain can knock us on our butt where we can sit and cry about it.**

Or...

**Pain can knock us on our knees where we can cry out to God.**

Which sounds better to you?

If you want or need more of an answer, please let me know!

### **If you're depressed, does that mean that something's wrong with you?**

Let me begin by saying that most people, at some time in their lives, struggle with depression. If most people experience it, it means that there’s nothing wrong with you; it’s just part of life.

I can tell you from my personal experience that it really does make a difference to have someone in your life to help you deal with it. If you would let us, any of the Staff or Volunteers would be honored to sit down and talk with you. We may not have all of the answers, but we DO know Somebody (named “God”) who does!

But I can't just leave this answer here. Instead, let me briefly mention how God can help get you out of depression. Many of us spend our time listening to what the world says; but God wants us to focus on Him. If you want help dealing with the negative thoughts inside your head, spend time telling yourself what God says about you! Tell yourself:

- God cares for you! (1 Peter 5:7)
- God has a plan for your life! (Jeremiah 29:11)
- God is for you! (Romans 8:31-34)
- You are forgiven! (1 John 1:9)
- You are God's Masterpiece! (Ephesians 2:10)
- You are loved! (John 3:16)

Write these verses out, tape them to your bathroom mirror, and then read them out loud every day. When you're feeling down, pull out the verses and read through them again. If someone says something that hurts your feelings, read the verses and listen to what God says, instead.

There's so much more that I want to share with you about this! If you want to know more, please come and find me!

### Is Gluttony a sin?

I grew up in the Catholic Church, which had the "Seven Deadly Sins" or "PEWGLAS" – Pride, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Lust, Avarice, and Sloth. Now, to be sure we're on the same page, let's define "gluttony" as:

Gluttony  
1: excess in eating or drinking  
2: greedy or excessive indulgence  
(Source: Merriam-Webster.com)

All right, now turn to 2 Hesitations 32:521, and you'll find:

*Thou shalt not eateth to excess, nor drink. No excessive indulgence shalt thou take, lest thou shalt need to take a Roloids or Alka-Seltzer. - 2 Hesitations 32:521 (FAKE)*

Actually, all kidding aside, if you dig around the Bible, you won't find any verse that specifically condemns gluttony. The best you get is by indirect reference. What do I mean by that? Let me show you:

*Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." - Luke 12:14-15 (NLT)*

Jesus says to not be greedy. In Greek, the word is πλεονεξίας (pleonexias) "the desire for more things". It's not quite gluttony, but if you are greedy and want more of something, then you're taking your eyes off of God and putting them on...stuff.

*Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. - 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NLT)*

Here Paul talks about the need to be self-disciplined, which would also include not eating or drinking to excess. In fact, Paul talks specifically about this in Galatians:

*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! - Galatians 5:22 (NLT)*

We are to make sure that we have self-control. Even more than that, if we let the Holy Spirit run our lives, we WILL have self-control!

So, is gluttony a sin? Officially there is no Bible verse that directly says, "Gluttony is a sin!"

However gluttony is linked to greed which is a sin. (See 1 Timothy 6:9-10.) Our lack of self-control shows us – and others – that our focus is on our flesh, not on the Spirit. (See Galatians 5:24.) Our obsession with food makes it an idol in our lives; robbing God of the focus He deserves. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11.) And when gluttony is a habit in our lives – as opposed to overeating once-a-year at Thanksgiving – then it shows we don't trust God to meet our needs. (See Matthew 6:11.)

All of these show a focus on self, a lack of faith in God, and that DOES make gluttony a sin.

### **Is it bad when you don't sing in church just because you don't feel like it?**

Do you want a surprise answer to this? The answer is "no"! In Isaiah 29:13, God says:

*"These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote." - Isaiah 29:13 (NLT)*

In other words, God doesn't want us to worship Him just because we HAVE to; He wants us to worship Him because we WANT to! God isn't looking for anything that we're forced to do, because that's not love.

I would tell you that if you don't feel like singing because you don't feel like praising God, maybe a better use of your time is praying and talking with Him, instead. He's always willing to listen and He wants to hear what you have to say!

### **Is it okay for Christians to take psych meds? What is "pharmakeia" referencing (drugs-sorcery-witchcraft-all)?**

Okay, let me take the second one first, because it's the easier question to answer. The Greek word

“pharmakeia”(φαρμακεία) means: poison, magic potion, or medicine/remedy, depending on the context. If you look up the use of this word strictly in the Bible, it occurs three times: Galatians 5:20, Revelations 9:21, and Revelations 18:23, and in each instance it’s used negatively. (It’s often translated as “sorcery”.)

However, it was common in Biblical times to prescribe medicines for ailments. The Bible often refers to physicians who took care of the sick. (Matthew 9:12, Mark 2:7, Luke 5:30, Colossians 4:14) According to other non-Biblical texts, physicians used “pharamakeia”, which means that they gave medicines to help cure the sick. One source I read said it would be doubtful that Jesus would associate Himself with the idea of a physician (Mark 2:17) or that Paul would refer to Luke as a physician (Colossians 4:14) if pharmakeia always had a negative connotation.

So, long answer long, in the Bible it’s always a negative word associated with magical potions and/or sorcery. In other writings from the time of the Bible, it refers to medicines prescribed by doctors to help heal the sick and is therefore good.

Now, is it okay to take psych meds? Let me answer that with some Bible verses:

- Isaiah has a cake of figs made to heal Hezekiah. (Isaiah 38:21)
- Jeremiah refers to the use of medicine to heal people in an allegorical sense. (Jeremiah 8:22)
- Jesus talks about using oil and wine when binding wounds. (Luke 10:34)
- Paul tells Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach. (1 Timothy 5:23)

So, there is a case for “medicine” to be given to those who are sick.

### **BARRY’S VIEW:**

I think that since God does not prohibit medicines we can use them. I also know that we live in a fallen world and our bodies don’t function the way that God intended them to.

I have both asthma and ADHD, so I totally get the idea of a body that’s NOT functioning! I use an inhaler for my lungs to make them work when they’re failing; and I use caffeine as a way to control my ADHD and allow me to focus. Would any of you criticize me for using “medicines” in this way? Probably not...

And while most of us would allow an inhaler, for some reason we make a “special case” for psych meds. But, if our brain isn’t functioning the way God designed it, and the medicine can help correct the chemical imbalance and enable us to live as God intended, why wouldn’t we do that? Why are psych meds any different than my inhaler? Both of them correct the issue with the body so that we can serve God.

Because of this, I don’t think there’s an issue with a Christian taking psych meds. If you disagree, please talk to me about it! But be prepared to explain to me the difference between Tums, Tylenol, Albuterol (inhaler), and Xanax, since all of them alter the body in some fashion...

**Is it sinful when you believe in the Lord and you support the LGBTQ+ but still know it’s wrong?**

Um...I think you already answered this yourself. If you know something is wrong but you support it anyhow, then yes, it's sin.

Probably the best verse I can give you here is in James 4:

*Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it. - James 4:17 (NLT)*

Actually, while we're in James, let me share with you this:

*But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. - James 1:22-25 (NLT)*

If the Bible calls it "sin", then we need to call it sin, too. We need to obey the Bible because otherwise we may not actually be a follower of Christ.

### **Is it sinful when you dream something dirty/inappropriate and can't help it?**

Whoa! That's a tough question, and I love it! To break it apart, we need to go to two places:

*But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. - Matthew 5:28 (NLT)*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus ratchets up what a sin is. In the Old Testament, it was only adultery if you acted on it. In the New Testament, it's sin if you think about acting on it!

How does this relate to the question at hand? Well, if you go to sleep fantasizing about something, then Jesus says that IS sin. In this case, the thought and the deed are equal, and we need to follow what Paul tells us in Philippians:

*And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. - Philippians 4:8 (NLT)*

In other words, we need to keep the inappropriate thoughts under control when we CAN control them.

But what about dreams? Can we control those? And the most simple answer is: no. (There ARE things we can do, but that's a whole other topic and there aren't enough trees that I can kill to write it all out here!)

For this one, I want to share with you a verse that Kowatch suggested when I mentioned this to him:

*And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one*

*doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. - Romans 7:18-20 (NLT)*

Paul – THE Paul – talks about his struggles with sin. He says that even when he tries to do the right thing, sometimes he messes up because of his sin nature. And those inappropriate dreams? They come from our sin nature.

The best thing to do is to spend your waking times growing closer to God. If you do that, if you put your focus on Him, He literally rewires your brain (another long topic) so that you won't have to be bothered by inappropriate dreams.

What a great question!

### **Is it wrong for women to be preachers? If we choose this for ourselves, is it dangerous religiously?**

This one closely ties in with the question, “Is it wrong for women to pray in church..?” In that answer, I showed you that two of the “proof texts” that are commonly referred to might not actually say what people think they do.

Now I intentionally skirted the issue of whether or not women CAN be preachers. Why? Because it's incredibly controversial, everybody has an opinion, and people tend to spend their time arguing this issue rather than living, giving, and serving. Theology, the study of God, is a good thing in and of itself; but when it divides us into “militant camps”, it becomes a problem. (By the way, the problem is NOT in theology; it's in ourselves!)

So, since I can't seem to dodge this one, let me explain what I see:

**Disclaimer:** These are **MY PERSONAL VIEWS!** I can justify them from the Bible, however they are still **MY PERSONAL VIEWS!** (Do you get the feeling that these are **MY PERSONAL VIEWS?**) Your family, your school, and your church may – and probably will – have differing opinions. If that's the case, please remember that these are **MY PERSONAL VIEWS!**

Before we deal with the present, though, let's take a look at women in the Bible and see what they were – and were not – allowed to do:

#### Deborah

If you flip to Judges 4, you'll find the first woman we need to talk about. In this time, Israel is a nation literally “under God”. The nation lives and works together and, if there's a problem, God raises up a person to save His people. Why is this important? Because in Judges 4:3 we find the following passage:

*Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who was judging Israel at that time. She would sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would go to her for judgment. - Judges 4:4-5 (NLT)*

In this story, we see: (a) Deborah is a prophet – someone who speaks for God; (b) she is ALREADY a judge of men; (c) she is well-known because people from all over Israel would show up to have her

judge cases between them; and (d) she is a leader of men (when she tells Barak to go, he goes).

So, does God have a problem with women speaking His words and leading men? Not remotely.

### Huldah

Another woman to consider is described in 2 Kings 22:

*Then [King Josiah] gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the court secretary, and Asaiah the king's personal adviser: "Go to the Temple and speak to the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah. Inquire about the words written in this scroll that has been found. For the Lord's great anger is burning against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words in this scroll. We have not been doing everything it says we must do."*

*So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the New Quarter of Jerusalem to consult with the prophet Huldah. She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, the keeper of the Temple wardrobe. - 2 Kings 22:12-14 (NLT)*

When King Josiah discovers that Judah has not been keeping the law of the Lord, he is in despair! He wants to know what he can do, and so he sends his most trusted advisors to go to the Temple and seek an answer from God. And who do they go to? Huldah, the prophet!

In this story, we see: (a) Huldah is actually SERVING in the Temple; (b) she is respected by others who serve God, including Hilkiah who is the High Priest (2 Kings 22:8); (c) she is given permission to speak on behalf of God; and (d) her words were listened to and respected by all those who went.

So, does God have a problem with women serving in the Temple and speaking for Him? Not remotely.

### Priscilla

And, just in case you thought this was just an "Old Testament" thing – which would still be enough, by the way – let's go to the New Testament:

In Acts 18, we meet Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They become friends with Paul, share in his work, and have a church that meets in their home. When they hear a young preacher named Apollos speaking in the synagogue, something quirky happens:

*Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. - Acts 18:24-26 (NLT)*

Notice that Aquila AND Priscilla sit down with Apollos and "explained to him the way of God more accurately". They share the task! It's not that Aquila explained and Priscilla just sat there in silence, like others would argue that women should do.

Even more important, there's a quirk in Greek that we should pay attention to in this passage. For the most part, Greek writers put the order of names in a group in order of importance. In other words, you name the most important person FIRST, and then others by descending rank. In verse 26, who is named first? Priscilla and THEN Aquila. If this is done in order of importance, then you can argue that it was Priscilla who did most of the teaching of a young preacher named Apollos.

In this story, we see: (a) Priscilla is co-equal, if not more important than, Aquila; (b) she is involved in the religious instruction of a man; and (c) she is equally commended by Paul with her husband!

So, does God have a problem with women teaching men about Him or leading in a church environment? Not remotely.

### The Church and Pastors

The final thing we need to consider are the phrases “the church” and “pastor”. If you look up the New Testament history of the church, it was a group of people, meeting in houses, and taking turns reading and studying the Scriptures.

The first “church building” in the world was probably the St. Georgeous Church in Jordan, built around 230 A.D. At that time, a dedicated “priesthood” would have begun to lead the church, probably based on the Jewish hierarchy of priests found in the Temple. This would have been the first step toward our “modern churches”; but it was a significant step AWAY from the New Testament model of the church where they were small groups that met together and then went out to serve God by serving their communities.

The phrase “pastor” is found nowhere in the Bible, itself. Instead, it's a Latin word that means “shepherd”. The phrases we see in the New Testament, however, are “elders”, “overseers”, and “shepherds” (in the Greek form, not Latin). If you do a study of these words, however, you find that there are many people in the church who fulfill these roles:

*Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. - Ephesians 4:11-12 (NLT)*

In other words, the idea of the entire church revolving around just one man is NOT Biblical, either. (Unless, of course, that “man” is Jesus!) God intended for multiple people within the church to fulfill these roles, not just one. (In fact, churches that are based on this model are more likely to fall into error, since it's only the input of one man that decides what is – or is NOT – allowed in the church!)

Why do I bring this up?

The question is, “Is it wrong for women to be preachers?” We've seen that in the Bible that women were allowed to teach, lead men, and to speak for God. We can also see that the structure of the modern church, along with the role of pastor, is not exactly the same structure of the church as described in the New Testament. Because of all that, I would argue that women CAN be preachers, since our current way of doing things is based on man's design, not God's... (I can sense the hate-mail coming from Pastors and churches now.)

**One Final Thought:** The question for me is not “SHOULD women be preachers?”, but “WHY do women want to be preachers?”

If you’re doing it because you want the attention, you want to lead, you want equality with men, etc., then you will NEVER be successful, even if you’re leading world-wide crusades and millions of people are coming to salvation through faith in Christ. Why? Because you’re doing it for you, not God... (By the way, this is true for both women AND men!)

If you’re doing it’s because you feel that God has gifted you in that direction, you want to serve God by serving others, you’re willing to humble yourself and sacrifice so that others can see Christ in you, and you’re willing to pay the price, then you should look into it and prayerfully consider it. (By the way, this is true for both women AND men!)

Your motives for seeking to be a preacher are more important to me than your gender is...

### **Is it wrong for women to pray in church and/or be pastors because of 1 Corinthians 14:34?**

So, this goes right along with the question that says, “Is it wrong for women to be pastors..?” With that in mind, I need to issue a disclaimer: The following is my opinion and only my opinion. I will back it up Biblically, but it’s still my opinion. If you disagree, please come and talk to me!

With that, let’s get started...

The two main verses used to justify why women CANNOT be pastors or speak in church are:

*Women should be silent during the church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak. They should be submissive, just as the law says. If they have any questions, they should ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for women to speak in church meetings. - 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (NLT)*

And...

*Women should learn quietly and submissively. I do not let women teach men or have authority over them. Let them listen quietly. - 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (NLT)*

Each of these seem very clear, right? Well... We need to take a serious look at them before we actually decide that the case is closed.

The first one is 1 Corinthians 14. If you have your Bibles with you, you should see a footnote. What does it say in your Bible? In mine, it says, “Some manuscripts place verses 34-35 after 14:40. Because of this, we have three choices:

Paul wrote it and it belongs at verses 34-35 where your Bible placed it.

If it’s in the right spot, Paul is contradicting what he said in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 AND there’s a flaw in the Greek argument that Paul is developing in verses 32-33. (It’s kind of a jarring

break to throw in verses 34-35 in the Greek and, if it's in the correct place, its style is unique in all of Paul's writings.) Also, these verses don't match ANY of Paul's writings in the rest of the chapter, let alone the book!

Paul wrote it and it belongs at the end of the chapter.

If it's in the wrong spot, then it belongs with Paul's rhetorical questions in verses 36-40. Paul is being sarcastic here. "Did the Gospel come from you? Are you really prophets? If so, let women sit down and learn in silence!" In this case, it's NOT meant to be taken literally, which means that it's in agreement with Paul's previous arguments. (It's still awkward in the Greek, but MUCH less awkward than Option #1.)

It was added later.

According to Gordon Fee, an expert in New Testament studies, it's entirely possible that this was added later. This happened with the ending to the Book of Mark, where the most reliable manuscripts did NOT include that ending. He makes a quite lengthy argument against these two verses in The New International Commentary On The New Testament: The First Epistle To The Corinthians © 1991. If we remove those two verses, the Greek makes sense, Paul's arguments don't contradict themselves, and the problems of trying to sort out what to do with those verses goes away.

The other verses in Timothy are a little more...straightforward. What you need to understand first in regards to Timothy is that Greek verb tenses are VERY specific. With that thought in mind, let's see what Paul is writing in Timothy. The phrase is: *"To teach however a woman not I do permit..."* (That's the literal Greek-to-English transliteration.)

Where it gets interesting is in the verb "I do permit." In the Greek, the phrase is "epitrepo". The verb tense is present, active, indicative. To understand what that means, let me show you:

*The first kind of verb we will discuss is the one which occurs most often in the New Testament: Present, Active, Indicative. That is, the tense is present (describing action taking place now), the voice is active (meaning that the verb's subject is acting and not being acted upon), and the mood is indicative (which demonstrates true reality). Present, Active, Indicative verbs are translated by a present tense English verb. (See the examples below in the vocabulary). - Theology.edu (2017)*

(I'm sure that explanation helped, too!) In other words, Present, Active, Indicative means that something is happening at the time that the author is writing. It actually says nothing about what will take place in the future or even in the past.

To put this into perspective, let's look at the phrase, "I'm teaching Chapel right now." Suppose I texted that to you. You would understand that to mean that, at the time of the text, I am CURRENTLY, up front and speaking. It says NOTHING about what I will be doing later. You wouldn't call me up in 30 years and say, "Oh! I'm sorry to interrupt you! You're teaching Chapel right now, aren't you!" The message I sent you in the past has no bearing on the present.

So, what are we left with? We're left with a place where there actually IS room for debate on the roles of women within the church. We're left with the opportunity to explore what Paul does – and does not

– allow for the service of women. This is a discussion that we should encourage and not be afraid of!

But, we also need to be aware that this isn't something that will be sorted out today, tomorrow, or even in the next year. We also need to be sensitive to the fact that people – that churches – will reach different conclusions. We don't always have to agree, but we DO need to listen and see if their doctrines, their beliefs, match what the Bible says.

### **Is using an Ouija Board a sin?**

Yes. (Weird, right?) The Bible is pretty clear on this:

*For example, never sacrifice your son or daughter as a burnt offering. And do not let your people practice fortune-telling, or use sorcery, or interpret omens, or engage in witchcraft, or cast spells, or function as mediums or psychics, or call forth the spirits of the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord. It is because the other nations have done these detestable things that the Lord your God will drive them out ahead of you. - Deuteronomy 18:10-12 (NLT)*

God absolutely HATES everything to do with the occult, and probably not just for the reasons you might think of. The main reason God hates the occult is because if we practice witchcraft, sorcery, or even using an Ouija Board to try to talk to the dead, it's because we humans want to have some power over the spiritual world; and that means we're putting ghosts and demons above God. (That's the obvious reason.)

The second reason is that people who claim to be psychics or mediums do a great job stealing money from widows and orphans – the two groups God fiercely protects! – by pretending to have messages for them from dead people. Did you know that the Bible NEVER allows for psychics to be real? That God NEVER allows the possibility that we can talk to the dead?

Also, did you know that the famous magician, Houdini, offered a TON of money and instant fame to anyone who could let him hear one message from his dear, deceased mother? He traveled the world and never had anyone come close! (He became so bitter about it, he declared war on the “spiritualists” and almost single-handedly destroyed the movement!)

Did you know that two men today – one a Christian and one an atheist – have continued Houdini's search? Both of them are older, and between them they've searched the world for a total of nearly 100 years and have NEVER found a real psychic? They both have offered a TON of money and instant fame to anyone who can prove that they have real psychic powers; and despite thousands trying, not one person has ever gotten close!

When God tells us to stay away, it's because God knows it's fake; God knows that people who spend their time doing it are turning away from Him; and God knows that the “psychics” and “mediums” out there are only doing it to steal money from hurting people. In other words, God says “no” for our own protection!

### **Sabbath. Why is it important? What should/shouldn't you do on the 7th Day?**

To answer this, we need to go back to the beginning: Creation! In Genesis, we find this:

Day One: God creates light.  
Day Two: God creates water / sky.  
Day Three: God creates dry ground / plants.  
Day Four: God creates sun, moon, stars.  
Day Five: God creates fish / birds.  
Day Six: God creates animals / humans.

Then we're told:

*So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation. - Genesis 2:1-3 (NLT)*

All right, so I have a trivia question for you: What is it that God creates on Day 7? And the answer is: "Rest" and "Recreation". It's the final act of Creation on God's part: We are to take a day off and rest! Modern scientists have even found that if we do rest, our stress levels go down, our bodies stand down, and we actually begin to heal ourselves!

In fact, we have a word that we all throw around that almost nobody pays any attention to. We use it, but we never stop to think about what it means. It's not enough for us to simply "rest", although resting is a good thing. We need "recreation". The word "recreation" literally means "re-creation, to create anew".

On the final day of Creation, God tells us that our bodies and brains need a reboot every week! What's funny is that a lot of scientists have finally caught up with what God said 6,000+ years ago!

Now the next question is: what do we do on the Sabbath? To answer that, we need to look at Exodus 20: The Ten Commandments! Let me show you:

*"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. - Exodus 20:8-11 (NLT)*

So God reminds the Israelites about the pattern that He set all the way back in Creation! So, what are we to do on the Sabbath day? Well, according to Exodus 20:

- Remember the day and set it apart for God.
- Don't do our "ordinary work".
- Rest.
- Spend time with God.

- Don't make other people do work.

Does this mean that we can't do ANY work? Nope! Jesus heals. Jesus teaches. Jesus serves. More importantly, the followers of Jesus in the New Testament actually do WORK on the Sabbath day. In fact, we're told:

*They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. - Acts 2:46-47 (NLT)*

Every day – including the Sabbath – these followers of Jesus go to the Temple, meet for Communion, cook for each other, praise God, and do evangelism (“*each day the Lord added to their fellowship...*”).

In fact, Jesus tells us:

*Then Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath.” - Mark 2:27 (NLT)*

So, what should YOU do? Here are the suggestions. At least once a week:

- Take a break from your normal work. (This doesn't have to be on Sunday!)
- Rest. (This can include sleeping, fishing, shopping, gardening. Whatever “re-creates” you!)
- Spend time with God. (Although if you only do this one day a week, you're missing out!)
- Let other people take a break, too!

Anything beyond that is man-made rules and is NOT what God requires!

**[Someone] asked me the other day if you have to close your eyes when you pray?**

Note: The rest of the question included: **My answer at the time is as long as you are focused on who you are actually talking too that's what is important. I said this because I say many prayers while I'm in the car and have quiet time. Just not sure if this was truly an accurate answer to have given.**

I love this! Do you know why we close our eyes, bow our heads, and fold our hands? It's because if you don't have children doing that, they see things and get distracted, they look around, or they poke people! In Bible times, there were different ways that people prayed:

Jesus looks up:

*So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me...” - John 11:41 (NLT)*

The Tax Collector looks down:

*“But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’” - Luke 18:13 (NLT)*

The Psalmist kneels:

*Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD our maker... - Psalm 95:6 (NLT)*

Ezekiel falls on his face:

*While I was still prophesying, Pelatiah son of Benaiah suddenly died. Then I fell face down on the ground and cried out, "O Sovereign LORD, are you going to kill everyone in Israel?" - Ezekiel 11:13 (NLT)*

Paul tells Timothy to lift hands:

*In every place of worship, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy. - 1 Timothy 2:8 (NLT)*

Based on all of this, is there a "right" way to pray? No. The position of your body matters less to God than the position of your heart. And PLEASE do NOT close your eyes to pray while driving! (I knew someone who did that once!)

**Was God the reason my dad didn't die in his accident?**

Honestly? This is a unique question in my world! I don't think I've EVER been asked this before by anyone of any age! Unfortunately the best answer that I can give you is: I really don't know.

I CAN share some stories with you that may help you to decide:

- I know of a young woman who got into a terrible car accident which damaged most of her organs and broke her spine! Pretty horrible, right? Well, it turns out that when they were checking her body for damage, they found a type of cancer that, when it first shows symptoms, you're already dying! If it wasn't for the accident, she would be dead of cancer. Is that God involved in her story? I actually think that it is...
- I was riding my motorcycle on a back country road when I hit loose gravel on a corner and ended up skipping my bike – and my body! – across the blacktop! I was in pretty bad shape, lying in the ditch, and I was in the middle of nowhere with not much of a chance of being seen or found. Suddenly, I heard a truck stop and a woman came running over. It turns out that she was an off-duty EMT just coming back from vacation AND she was running late...which is why she happened to be on that stretch of road at that time. Is that God involved in my story? Well, what are the odds of an off-duty EMT being in the right place at the right time to save my life?

Now, could these situations have happened without God setting it up? Maybe... However, the longer I've lived, the more I've come to doubt such a thing as coincidence!

And, maybe God was involved in your dad's accident, too... (I hope that's a good enough answer!)

**What about hurt, the broken and diseased? Why did God create that?**

At first, when I read this question, I thought about skipping it; after all, there are similar questions in this binder. However, as I re-read it, I decided that I NEEDED to cover it, just to make sure people

understand exactly what is – and is not – supposed to be in this world.

To begin with, we need to see what God actually did create. So we need to make a journey all the way back to Genesis 1:

*Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! - Genesis 1:31a*

God never intended for us to hurt, to be broken or to suffer diseases. In the beginning, it was all “good”. We were in a perfect relationship with God, humans were literally walking with God in the Garden! How much better could it get? At that time, we didn't know what it was like to have our feelings hurt, to feel sad, to be ashamed, or to even suffer.

But all of that changed with the choice of humans to sin:

*When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. - Romans 5:12 (NLT)*

So our actions – our sins – brought death and suffering; our choices caused us pain. These aren't God's creations...they're ours. And we suffer to this day because of the choices we've made.

### **What do I do when it feels like God's not hearing me / stagnated faith?**

What you – what all of us – need is something called “revival”. To steal a definition from GotQuestions.org:

*Revival refers to a spiritual reawakening from a state of dormancy or stagnation in the life of a believer. It encompasses the resurfacing of a love for God, an appreciation of God's holiness, a passion for His Word and His church, a convicting awareness of personal and corporate sin, a spirit of humility, and a desire for repentance and growth in righteousness. (Source: GotQuestions.org)*

To experience revival in your own life, you need to do a few key steps:

1. Pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to revive you. Ask God to convict you. Ask Jesus to change you again. There's a prayer in Psalms that I love:

*Won't you revive us again, so your people can rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation. - Psalm 85:6-7 (NLT)*

2. Read the Bible. Pick your FAVORITE book and dig into it. Don't just rely on podcasts, YouTube videos, or me on a Sunday morning! Instead, pick up your Bible and see what God has to say to you!

*So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ. - Romans 10:17 (NLT)*

3. Hang out with other believers. People who are excited about God can reignite the excitement in you. In fact we're told in Proverbs 27:17:

*As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend. - Proverbs 27:17 (NLT)*

4. Find a "mountain top" experience. There are some phenomenal Christian concerts that can help get you excited again. (Check out Lifest!) There are meetings like the "If Gathering...", "No Regrets Men's Conference", "Promise Keepers", "Women Of Faith", and more! (Yep...no Bible verse(s) here.)
5. Listen to different music.
  - A. I always like to suggest people go for some "old school" praise. Go search for stuff like: "Make My Life" by Keith Green, "Create In Me A Clean Heart" by Keith Green, or "Take My Heart" by Billy Sprague.
  - B. Check out modern songs like "Lord I Need You" by Matt Maher, or "In Christ Alone" by Travis Cottrel.
  - C. Finally, I'd like to recommend some "bouncy" songs that we use at Camp, like: "Oh Happiness" by David Crowder Band, "Undignified" by David Crowder Band, or "My Lighthouse" by Rend Collective.

Oh, and this is Biblical, too:

*Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, bless His name; proclaim His salvation day after day. - Psalm 96:1-2 (NLT)*

A lot of the time we have stagnated faith is because we're living out our faith in a routine. In other words, it's the same devotions, in the same way, at the same time, with the same prayers, in the same place, with the same music, etc.

There's an old saying:

***Do what you've always done, get what you've always got.***

This is true for our spiritual life, too! By changing what we do, by focusing on areas of the Bible we love, by hanging out with others who are excited, we can change the way we experience our walk with Jesus.

### **What DO you do when other people are praying?**

Okay, this is one of my favorite questions. A lot of people stand around, feel awkward, let their thoughts wander, or just wonder when someone is going to get done! Have you ever heard someone speaking and you totally agreed with what they were saying? You're sitting there, nodding your head because what they're saying matches what you want/think/believe. When other people pray, we're supposed to be doing the same thing. We listen to what they're saying and running it past what we believe.

Have you ever wondered why we end our prayers with “Amen”? The word comes from a Hebrew word that was translated into Aramaic that was adopted by the Greeks and then became part of Latin and finally arrived in English. (Whew! Long journey!)

Amen literally means, “We agree!” (In the literal Hebrew, it means “to be sure of something true”.) So, when someone is praying, listen along. At the end, if you agree with what was said and you want to support them, you simply say, “Amen”.

### **What does Jesus want us to understand? How does He want us to live? How do we follow Him?**

Out of all of the questions I received in this batch of NDQ, this was arguably the toughest one to answer. Honestly, though, it’s NOT that tough...and that’s why I didn’t like it. I wanted to write an answer that killed a few trees, but I can sum this up pretty easily in a few short paragraphs.

In Matthew 22, we’re told this:

*Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” – Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT)*

To explain this, let me break down these two ideas:

*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.*

In this passage, Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 6. The Israelites in Deuteronomy had a covenant relationship with God: If Israel would follow God, God would protect Israel. Later, God – through Jesus – creates a new covenant with us: If we will follow Jesus, He will save us from our sins.

To love God, then, means:

#### ***Read the Bible.***

We need to get into God’s Word to discover who He is.

#### ***Pray.***

We need to spend out time in conversation with God – both talking AND listening!

#### ***Meet with other believers.***

In Hebrews 10:25, we’re told that we need to meet with other believers and encourage each other. We, as followers of Christ, are NOT capable of doing it all on our own!

#### ***Put Christ first.***

Like we talked about with voting, literally EVERYTHING we do should be Christ-focused! If you’re watching movies you know you shouldn’t, stop. If you’re hanging out with people who are dragging you down, stop. If you’re holding onto your sins, stop. Our hearts, our souls, and our minds should be focused on God.

*Love your neighbor as yourself.*

Here Jesus is quoting from Leviticus 19:18. If you've never read this verse, go back and read the whole CHAPTER! In it, God tells Israel how they're supposed to treat everyone: fellow believers, neighbors, foreigners, widows, orphans, the sick, and more. (It really IS a good chapter to read!)

To love others, then, means:

***We serve them.***

Whether they are Christians or not, we're called to serve them. This can be through giving, through manual labor, or by treating them with respect even if they don't deserve it.

***We help them.***

Part of being a Christian is seeing the needs of others and meeting them to the best of our ability. We cannot do everything, but that's no excuse to do nothing!

***We show them Christ.***

If you're grateful to God for being saved from your sins, how can you NOT tell another person? Serving and helping are key aspects to being a Christian; showing them Christ is a foundational command. In fact, it's so important that Jesus gives the Great Commission in five different ways! (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-23, Acts 1:6-8)

What does Jesus want us to understand? He wants us to understand how important a relationship with Him is. How does Jesus want us to live? By showing, serving, and telling others. How do we follow Him? We draw closer to Him daily.

Like I said, I somehow felt like I need to give a deeper an answer, but "basic" is usually better.

**What is Ash Wednesday?**

This question usually gets asked every "Ash Wednesday". (Kind of quirky, right?) So, what is it?

Ash Wednesday starts the 40 days of "Lent". From that date, it's forty days to Easter Sunday – not counting the Sundays in between. Lent is a time for prayer (talking to God), fasting (giving up food to spend time in prayer), self-denial (not chasing your desires or interests), and giving up sinful habits so that you can focus on your relationship with God. (It's called "Ash Wednesday" because the pastor/priest usually rubs ashes in the shape of the cross on the foreheads of those who celebrate this.)

This celebration isn't mentioned in the Bible, nor is the season of Lent, so we are free to celebrate or to not. (Source: orlutheran.com)

**What is "Free Will"?**

Free will is simply the ability to choose. God made a perfect world – Genesis 1:31 says that He called it "good" - and then put humans in the Garden so that we could walk with Him and talk with Him. Our

life was supposed to be lived in a permanent, perfect relationship with God! Instead of making robots, though, God gave us the ability to either love Him or reject Him. So, what do we do in Genesis 3? We walked away.

God still gives us that choice every single day – we can choose to follow Him or not; choose to do what is right or choose to sin. It's all about our choices.

### **What is the bad seed of jealousy and envy?**

Before we can answer this, we need to define two words. Care to guess what they are?

#### **Jealousy**

*2.a.: intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness*

*3: vigilant in guarding a possession*

#### **Envy**

*1: painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage*

*(Source: Merriam-Webster.com)*

Now, most Americans think that these two are interchangeable; and, in fact, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists them as synonyms (words that mean basically the same thing). The problem is that if you read these definitions, there IS a very distinct difference!

Jealousy is literally “guarding what is yours”. You own it, it’s yours, and you want to keep it. In marriage, my wife vowed to forsake all others. If she goes out on a date with another man, do I have the right to be jealous? Absolutely! She’s “mine” because she vowed she would be!

Envy, on the other hand, is “wanting what someone else has”. In other words, I see that you have a nicer house...and I want it. I see that you’re making more money...and I want it. It’s NOT mine, it’s never BEEN mine, and yet I think it SHOULD be mine!

Jealousy in and of itself is NOT a sin. How can I say that? Because even God, Himself, gets jealous. Let me show you in Exodus 34:14:

*You must worship no other gods, for the LORD, whose very name is Jealous, is a God who is jealous about his relationship with you. - Exodus 34:14 (NLT)*

In other words, God says, “I have a relationship with you! I promised to protect you! You promised to follow Me! We have a covenant relationship! Because of that, if you walk away from Me to follow other “gods”, I will be jealous!” Is His jealousy justified? Certainly! Israel belonged to God by covenant, and so it was fine for God to be jealous of something/someone who belonged to Him!

By the way, that’s just Exodus 34:14. Check out these verses for more about God being jealous:

- Exodus 20:5
- Deuteronomy 4:23-24
- Deuteronomy 5:9

- Deuteronomy 6:15
- Deuteronomy 32:16
- Joshua 24:19
- Psalm 79:5
- Psalm 78:58

In all of these examples, God is jealous because His people – Israel – have rejected Him and chased after other “gods”. And His jealousy is appropriate.

On the other hand, God CANNOT be envious! Envy is when I look at someone else and want something that they have and I don’t. Why can’t God feel envy? Because He owns...everything!

Envy IS a sin...always. When I want what someone else has, I’m literally saying, “I’m so important, I deserve what you have! You’re not important enough to have it, but I am!” See why this would be a sin? So, what’s the “seed” of envy? It’s pride: believing that I’m so important that I deserve whatever I want, whenever I want it.

Do you want a test to see if you are struggling with envy? Go to a quiet space, pull out a journal, and write a list of things that you ***already have and that you still want***. Then, on a second page, write out a list of the things that ***you want but don’t have***. If the list of what you want is longer than the list of what you have, you need to take some time and talk to God about the envy in your life.

In conclusion, “jealousy” is appropriate and even God feels jealousy. Jealousy only becomes a sin when the actions we take are a sin. (I beat up the man who wants to date my wife.) Envy, however, is always a sin.

### **What is the best way to study the Bible effectively?**

Wow! In all of the years that I’ve been a Pastor, I don’t think ANYONE has ever asked me this. (That’s kind of surprising to me, now that I think about it!) Okay, so here are my tips for effective Bible Study:

#### First, get a Bible.

I know this may come as a shock, but without a Bible, you can’t study the Bible. But more to the point, if you have a translation of the Bible that you don’t like, you’re less likely to actually take the time to study it. Because of that, don’t be afraid to check out other options. These can include: New King James Version, New Living Translation, English Standard Version, etc. (By the way, skip paraphrases like “The Message”. In my opinion, they’re not all that useful.) If you want something easily understood, I recommend the New Living Translation.

#### Second, commit yourself to a plan.

This may come as a shock to you, but I actually HATE the “Read the Bible in one year!” plans. Why? Because you have to read, on average, 80 billion chapters a day. (I may be exaggerating a bit here...) If you miss a day, you have 160 billion chapters to read the next day. Finally, most people who miss a few days give up in frustration. My suggestion is to simply read one chapter a day. If you miss a day, it’s very easy to make up. Also, if you commit to this, you will read through the Bible in about three years and three months. While that may seem like a long time, it beats the fact that most Christians will NEVER read the entire Bible in their entire lifetimes!

Third, pick a set time.

To start this, do NOT think you have to do your Bible Study in the morning! I am NOT a morning person, and when I did my studies in the morning, I would reread the same passage eight times, give up, and then go make coffee. Pick a time that works best for you. (When I worked construction, I would read during my lunch break. I was awake, had energy, and had nothing else to do. I also knew I would be tired by the end of the day.) Whatever time you pick, try to do it at the same time every day so that you get into a routine.

Fourth, pray before you read.

If you do this, it can calm your mind and get rid of outside thoughts. It's a lot easier to study your Bible if you're not thinking about what you have to do next.

Fifth, think about what you're reading.

Why did God feel it was important to put that chapter into the Bible? What can you, personally, get out of it? Here's where Bibles with Study Notes and/or commentaries can help a ton! There are a bunch of free commentaries on <https://biblehub.com/>. (You can buy them, but "free" is usually better!) By the way, remember that commentaries and study notes are what humans THINK the Bible says. While they can give you insight, remember that God's words are more important than the words of humans.

Sixth, find a person to study with (even if it's online)!

First, the number one reason to do this is because that person holds us accountable to actually DO a Bible Study! Second, I don't know about you, but it helps me to understand something better by explaining it to someone else. (If I can't explain it then I haven't thought it all the way through.) Third, they can give us insights and ideas that we may not have thought of. All good stuff, right?

But, this comes with a word of warning: Keep in mind that they may not be any more "right" than you are. If you read something and you both disagree, or if there's something you just don't understand, feel free to reach out to a Pastor or someone with more training. You can also use online resources like <https://www.gotquestions.org/>.

These are my basic hints for effective Bible Study. And, while they may seem simple, they really do help to make sure we both get into the Word of God and stay there.

### **What is the purpose of speaking in tongues..?**

The full version of this question was: *What is the purpose of speaking in tongues? Why are some denominations so focused on it being the biggest evidence of baptism of the Holy spirit? Is prophecy not better than tongues as Paul states in 1 Corinthians it helps the church more and he himself would rather speak five understandable words than 10,000 in tongues?* (I hope you understand why I only put part of that in the "title" for the index!)

All right, I'm going to answer this, and I may offend some of you in the process. If you believe differently, please come and find me so that we can talk more. (Bring your Bible so we can dig into God's Word to see what it says!)

### In The Beginning...

Let's start by taking a look at something called "Pentecost" in the Book of Acts:

*On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. - Acts 2:1-4 (NLT)*

So on Pentecost, the early Christians are "baptized with the Spirit" and they speak in tongues. The purpose of tongues was so that believers could speak known, earthly languages so that they could share the Gospel with others in Jerusalem. (See Acts 2:5-12).

When people talk about the "Baptism of the Spirit", this is the first place they point to, and they are correct! The Baptism of the Holy Spirit was a separate event, apart from salvation, that was promised by Jesus before He was crucified! (See John 14.)

Later on in Acts, we see the "Baptism of the Spirit" being done by the laying on of hands:

*The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit. - Acts 8:16-17 (NLT)*

Please note that in this case, they do NOT receive the gift of tongues! It's just the Baptism of the Spirit.

To sum it up, in the early church, the Baptism of the Spirit was a separate event that may or may not have conferred the gift of tongues. (We'll get to more of that later.)

### After The Beginning...

In the Book of Romans, baptism seems to refer to regular baptism and no longer to a Baptism of the Spirit:

*Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. - Romans 6:3-4 (NLT)*

We join with Christ Jesus in baptism. Since we are joined with God-the-Son in baptism, then it would be logical to assume we then have the Holy Spirit, as well; especially since there is no additional reference to a baptism of the Holy Spirit. (I hope that makes sense to you.)

Later on, we find:

*And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he*

*promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him. - Ephesians 1:13-14 (NLT)*

Notice here that the Holy Spirit is given “when you believed in Christ”. There is no “Baptism of the Spirit” mentioned.

To sum it up, in Acts, at the start, the Baptism of the Spirit is a separate event. Later on, the Holy Spirit is given to us at the moment of salvation, with no other “baptism” required. (Hopefully that makes sense.)

Now we need to deal with one other part of your question: speaking in tongues. Let’s go to 1 Corinthians – and Paul again – to see the answer to this:

*A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have. - 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (NLT)*

Notice that the Holy Spirit gives us all **different** gifts. To one that get wise advice, to another they get special knowledge. Then, check out verse 10: “**Still another person** is given the ability to speak in unknown languages...” It doesn’t say, “ALL believers are given this gift...” It says some will...and some won’t.

Also, in Greek, it doesn’t say “speak in unknown languages”. Literally, the Greek says, “to a different one various kinds of tongues”. The word “tongues” is γλῶσσῶν (glōssōn) which means the language of a nation.

Now your church may disagree, but there are four main things I read in the Bible:

First, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit WAS required at the beginning, but then the Holy Spirit began to be given at the moment of salvation. (In other words, the way we received the Holy Spirit changed as the church began to grow.)

Second, in the Bible, the gift of tongues was only given to certain people; not everyone. Because of this, if the gift of tongues continues to this day, it will only be given to certain people; not everyone.

Third, the tongues that were spoken in the Bible were known languages. (This is a HOT topic, but I can back this up in 1 Corinthians 13, if you wish!) Because of this, speaking in tongues to this day should only be done in known languages for the purpose of sharing the Gospel with people from around the world.

Finally, because the gift of tongues has never been universal, having the gift – or not having it – doesn't make you any more or less of a Christian. (No spiritual gift makes you more or less of a Christian!)

Finally, to answer your last part, you mention:

*But in a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language. - 1 Corinthians 14:19 (NLT)*

If I get up and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, speak in Akkadian, what benefit is that to anyone? No one understands the language, and without a translation it's meaningless gibberish. So rather than using my spiritual gift to quote John 3:16 in Akkadian, I have more value speaking it in English to my English audience.

Just because I have the gift of tongues does not mean that it edifies others when used outside of its proper context. In a case like this, prophecy WOULD be the more useful gift! (I would argue against the word "better", since all gifts come from the Holy Spirit and all have a purpose and a place.)

Whew! Long answer there! As always, if you disagree, come talk to me...and bring your Bible!

### **What is the Unforgivable Sin?**

To answer this, we need to look at the context. You're going to find references to the Unforgivable (or Unpardonable) Sin in Matthew 12:31 and Mark 3:29. The set up is that the religious leaders are accusing Jesus of being able to cast out demons because He was in league with Satan.

Jesus gives them a short lecture, explaining that it wouldn't make any sense to have someone on Satan's side casting out Satan's demons! He then points out that they have people who cast out demons, so where do they get their power from? (Hey look! Sarcasm!) Finally, Jesus says that whoever isn't for Him is against Him. And then we find:

*"So I tell you, every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven—except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will never be forgiven." - Matthew 12:31 (NLT)*

So, what does this mean? It means that we look at the miracles of God and call them the work of "nature", "accident", or "the Devil". In other words, we intentionally lie to ourselves and refuse to acknowledge the work that God has done. Why is this unforgivable? Because we have made the choice to never even ask for forgiveness!

The next question I usually get is, "Can a Christian commit the Unforgivable Sin?" The better way to phrase this, though, is to ask, "Can a Christian lose their salvation?" After years of research, I don't think we can. But, let me give you two scenarios to think about:

First, if we deliberately turn our back on Jesus, if we lie to ourselves and say that everything we used to believe was wrong, and if we consciously choose to walk away from God and never return, what does that mean to our relationship with God? Better yet, were we truly saved in the first place?

Second, if we truly ARE a Christian, can I deliberately turn my back on Jesus, lie to myself and say that everything I used to believe was wrong, and consciously choose to walk away from God and never return? Sure! The Bible allows for “backsliding”. (Proverbs 14:14, Jeremiah 14:7, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Galatians 6:1, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 2:4-5, etc.) It doesn’t mean I’m “unsaved”, but it does mean that I’m going to have a conversation with God on the Day of Judgment!

### **What [should I] look for in a significant other?**

This is actually a VERY good question, and I’m surprised I haven’t been asked it before. So, with that, let me give you some of the biblical guidelines for friendship/dating/marriage.

So let’s deal with “friendship” first. If you want a LOT of great verses about friendship, go read the Book of Proverbs. There are some great verses, like:

*There are “friends” who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother. - Proverbs 18:24 (NLT)*

A true friend is someone who you can count on more than family. They will love you, support you, and they want what’s best for you! Going along with that:

*An open rebuke is better than hidden love! Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy. - Proverbs 27:5-6 (NLT)*

If you find a friend, make sure it’s one who can speak the truth to you in love. I have a friend who, if he says, “Barry! You’re being dumb!” I listen to. Why? Because at that point, I probably AM being dumb. I trust him and he cares enough for me to speak the truth, even when I might not like it.

Next, for a friend, they should be a Christian:

*... And if there is no resurrection, “Let’s feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!” Don’t be fooled by those who say such things, for “bad company corrupts good character.” Think carefully about what is right, and stop sinning. For to your shame I say that some of you don’t know God at all. - 1 Corinthians 15:32b-34 (NLT)*

If your friends spend their time denying Jesus, making fun of what you believe, or forcing you to pretend to be someone else so that you can earn their approval – or not be punished for being “you” – then they’re not worth keeping as friends.

Does this mean you can’t be friends with non-Christians? Nope. It just means that if you see yourself changing – and not for the better! – you may want to reconsider if they’re worth keeping as friends.

Finally, they should want to keep God first in all they do:

*Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your*

*heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.” - Mark 12:29-31 (NLT)*

If you have a friend who’s a Christian, they can help strengthen your faith. If they care for others, they can help you to care for others, too! Find a strong Christian friend, and they can help you live out your faith more easily!

Okay, so let’s switch from “friendship” to “significant other”:

The first thing I’m going to tell you is that everything I just covered still applies! Why would you not want to date someone who you can trust? Someone who can speak truth into your life? Who can help you live your life for Jesus?

So, start with someone who has those characteristics, and let’s add a few more to them:

*“Haven’t you read the Scriptures?” Jesus replied. “They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female.’” And he said, “‘This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.” - Matthew 19:4-6 (NLT)*

The Bible says that your significant other has to be the opposite sex. This isn’t popular in our modern society, but we have to decide if we want to please Jesus...or humans. By the way, if you’re offended at this, please come and talk to me!

Next, the Bible – specifically Paul – speaks even more strongly about the need for your “significant other” to be a Christian:

*Don’t team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? And what union can there be between God’s temple and idols? - 2 Corinthians 6:14-16a (NLT)*

By the way, this is talking about “contractual obligations”. In other words, don’t marry a nonbeliever. But more than that, don’t pick them as your business partner. Don’t go into a deal together. Why? Because you both have differing – contradictory, actually – standards!

If you marry a really sweet, loving, supportive person who isn’t a Christian, it would be fine, right? Well, what happens at Christmas? Easter? What if you want to send your children to Crescent Lake Bible Camp and they want to send your children to a secular Camp? Who wins? All-in-all, it’s not worth the stress that this is going to create!

Finally, I have some GREAT advice! Instead of asking me how to pick a “significant other”, why don’t you read the most beautiful love story in the entire Bible? Go check out the Book of Ruth. It’s only four chapters long, so read through the whole thing.

As you go, look at the people in the story. Ruth, is beautiful, and modest, and a hard worker and kind and... Well, you get the idea. Boaz is honorable, and he cares for people, and he makes sure the poor are taken care of, and he follows the rules and... Well, you get the idea.

If you can find your “Ruth” or “Boaz”, you’re off to a great start to having a great relationship and great marriage!

I hope this helps! Again, I thought this was a GREAT question and I’m grateful to you for asking it!

### **When [the Bible says] "By His stripes we were healed" is that referring to the spirit man or the body and soul?**

Okay, to answer this message requires a little longer explanation:

First, of all you referenced “by His stripes we were healed”. The verse in question here is Isaiah 53:

*But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. - Isaiah 53:5 (NLT)*

Within context, this is talking about being healed from sin; NOT physical healing. We need to be very, very careful about not taking verses out of their context because, if we do, then we can be disappointed and end up rejecting God.

For example, if I think this verse says, “God is ALWAYS going to heal people!”, then if I’m not healed, either the Bible lied or I’m not worthy of being healed. In either case, the outcome isn’t good.

The other thing to realize is that there are NO verses that say, “God will heal everyone!” (Actually, that’s not quite true, and we’ll get there eventually.)

#### Reason People Aren’t Healed #1: Lack Of Faith On The Part Of The Sick Person

The passage for that is Matthew 13:

*When Jesus had finished telling these stories and illustrations, he left that part of the country. He returned to Nazareth, his hometown. When he taught there in the synagogue, everyone was amazed and said, “Where does he get this wisdom and the power to do miracles?” Then they scoffed, “He’s just the carpenter’s son, and we know Mary, his mother, and his brothers—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. All his sisters live right here among us. Where did he learn all these things?” And they were deeply offended and refused to believe in him.*

*Then Jesus told them, “A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his own family.” And so he did only a few miracles there because of their unbelief. - Matthew 13:53-58 (NLT)*

Strangely enough, people who don’t believe in Jesus or mock Him don’t experience healing. Does this mean that it’s a lack of faith that prevents ALL healing? Nope.

### Reason People Aren't Healed #2: Lack Of Faith Of Person DOING The Healing

The second reason that people aren't healed is because of the lack of faith of the person trying to do the healing in Jesus' name. The passage for that is Matthew 17:

*At the foot of the mountain, a large crowd was waiting for them. A man came and knelt before Jesus and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son. He has seizures and suffers terribly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. So I brought him to your disciples, but they couldn't heal him."*

*Jesus said, "You faithless and corrupt people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." Then Jesus rebuked the demon in the boy, and it left him. From that moment the boy was well.*

*Afterward the disciples asked Jesus privately, "Why couldn't we cast out that demon?"*

*"You don't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible." - Matthew 17:14-21 (NLT)*

In this case, the man has enough faith but the Disciples don't. Does this mean that it's lack of faith that prevents ALL healing? Nope.

### Reason People Aren't Healed #3: God Has Other Plans

My favorite example of this is Paul in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul is a follower of Jesus, writes most of the New Testament, plants churches everywhere, performs miracles, casts out demons...and suffers from sickness all of his life.

Take a look at these verses:

*That experience is worth boasting about, but I'm not going to do it. I will boast only about my weaknesses. If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.*

*Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships,*

*persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. - 2 Corinthians 12:5-10 (NLT)*

Paul's faith is greater than mine...and God doesn't heal him. Paul's work for Jesus is greater than mine...and God doesn't heal him. Paul works miracles by the power of Jesus...and God doesn't heal him.

Reason People Aren't Healed #4: People Refuse The Options In Front Of Them

Does this mean that we reject modern medicines and only rely on faith for God to heal us? Nope. What if God has provided us with a means of being healed and we reject it?

What if we say, "God? I know that aspirin – which is derived from willow bark – can ease my pain. But I don't want to take aspirin! I want you to heal me, instead!" Is that fair? Is that appropriate? Is that faith? Or is it putting God to the test and/or forcing Him to do things my way?

Please keep in mind that there ARE "medicines" mentioned in the Bible. (See Isaiah 38:21, Jeremiah 8:22 – this is allegorical, Luke 10:34, and 1 Timothy 5:23.)

Lastly, one source I read said it would be doubtful that Jesus would associate Himself with the idea of a physician (Mark 2:17) or that Paul would refer to Luke as a physician (Colossians 4:14) if pharmakeia always had a negative connotation.

So where does that leave us?

1. To assume that God heals everyone is to miss the fact that MOST people in the Bible are NOT healed. For every person healed, there's a hundred in the crowd who aren't...
2. To assume that God MUST heal is to miss the fact that there were people – legends of faith like Paul – who were NOT healed.
3. We must not condemn people for either accepting or rejecting modern medicines. I have asthma and use an inhaler. I was told to try herbs...and ended up in the hospital a few times. I tried to not use anything...and ended up in the hospital a few times. I carry my inhaler because God gave someone the wisdom to make the medicine that keeps me out of the hospital. (At the same time there ARE medicines that I DO have a problem with.) I think in this case, each person must answer to their own conscience.
4. I think we need to realize that all sickness and disease is the result of living in a fallen world. While sickness MAY be the result of "spiritual oppression", much of it is just the result of living in a world that's falling apart and that humans have polluted.

All right, now to bring it back home to your original question(s):

First, "by His stripes we're healed" is about forgiveness of sins, not physical healing.

Second, God does sometimes heal...and sometimes He doesn't. My faith is not affected by my body failing. In fact, on the days that I can't breathe, I find that I spend more time in prayer. Pain can be a way to point us back to God.

Third, as far as pharma/no pharma, I leave that to people's personal decisions. Do I think meds can be good? Sure. (I LIKE breathing!) Do I think meds can be bad? Sure. (Look at all the abuse of drugs!) But do I think it comes down to "Biblical" versus "Non-Biblical"? No.

Fourth, as far as herbal supplements/no herbal supplements, I leave that to people's personal decisions, as well. Do I think herbs are bad? Not usually. Are there some that ARE bad? Yes. (Some "popular" herbs have been tested and have some nasty side-effects.) But do I think it comes down to "Biblical" versus "Non-Biblical"? No. The Bible doesn't mention them one way of the other.

If you feel you need to see a doctor for medications, then do so. If you want to try a natural approach, then do so. Since the Bible doesn't say one way or another, it comes down to our personal preferences.

Oh, and I need to wrap this up by pointing out the verse that says, "God ALWAYS heals!" Turn to Revelation 21:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

*I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." - Revelation 21:1-4 (NLT)*

In the end, in Heaven, all the sickness that comes from living in a fallen world is healed. At that point, there is no more suffering, pain, or death.

That's the time that God heals...everyone.

I hope this helps.

### **When taking the elements at Communion, what should your response be as you take your elements?**

All right, there's two ways to answer this:

First, most churches – ours included – will say something to you as you take the elements (bread and juice). A lot of time it's, "Body of Christ" and "Blood of Christ". If this is what you're asking about, there isn't a response required. (I supposed you could say "Thank You" to those serving you, since it would be polite.)

Second, when you're sitting there with the elements, your response should be an inward

reflection. In 1 Corinthians, we're told:

*So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died. - 1 Corinthians 11:27-30 (NLT)*

Look at your life, confess your sins, ask for forgiveness, and then join in Communion.

I'm hoping this answers your question. I just wasn't sure exactly what "taking the elements" meant. Was it when you took them from the plate or when you actually eat/drink.

**Why, after Adam and Eve sinned, was man so evil if nobody told them what was right and wrong? How did they know what was evil and what wasn't? Why did they get punished for it?**

Okay, there are a lot of pieces to this question, and we need to take it apart carefully. It really would help for you to have your Bibles open, starting in Genesis 4:

The first thing to understand is that we're NOT told that everyone is "so evil". In fact, the first two people we meet after Adam and Eve are Cain and Abel:

*When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD. Abel also brought a gift—the best of the firstborn lambs from his flock. - Genesis 4:2b-4a (NLT)*

From this we can see that both Cain and Abel are good men, hard workers, and that they were trying to maintain a relationship with God. Unfortunately, they go about it in VERY different ways! Reread that section again and see if you can see the way they approach God!

Notice that Cain brings "some of his crops". It's like Cain is saying to God, "Hey God! Look, I suppose I should give You a gift or something. Let me see... I've got some leftover stuff laying on the ground. I know you're God and I'm supposed to respect You, but You're just going to have to be happy with whatever I give you."

Abel, on the other hand, looks at God and says, "You are God! You are worthy of respect! I will give not just from what I have; I'm going to give You my best. Why? Because You're worth it!"

God, for obvious reasons, rejects Cain's offering. (By the way, what are you offering to God? Are you giving Him your best, or simply what you have leftover and you expect Him to be okay with it?) The story continues:

*"Why are you so angry?" the LORD asked Cain. "Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch*

*out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.” - Genesis 4:6-7 (NLT)*

From this, we can assume that Cain knows very well what is right and what is wrong. Why? Because God doesn't bother to explain it. (We'll get to more of that later.) Instead, God says that Cain has a choice – he can choose to give into his sin or to control himself. Cain gives in...and kills Abel...who didn't do anything wrong...

If you read the rest of Genesis, you'll find people exerting their free will, making choices to do good or evil, right or wrong. And, because of that, you see the consequences for their choices. Again, like we said before, we always get to make our choices; but our sovereign God – the One who created everything – gets to choose our consequences.

So, not everyone was automatically evil after that Fall. In fact, we're even told in Genesis 5:21-24 that Enoch, one of Adam and Eve's descendants, walks so closely with God that he's taken up to Heaven!

The other part of this question, “how did they know what was evil and what was not”, is in the very nature of the decision made by Adam and Eve. Let me show you what I mean:

*But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden — except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.” - Genesis 2:16-17 (NLT)*

*Then the LORD God said, “Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil...” - Genesis 3:22a (NLT)*

What was the nature of the fruit in the Garden of Eden? It made us understand the difference between good and evil. That knowledge was passed on, along with our fallen nature, through Adam and Eve to their children. The Bible tells us that we KNOW right from wrong because it's written in our hearts. (Jeremiah 31:33, Romans 1:19-21, and elsewhere.)

Everything that humans do after that is, like we saw with Cain and Abel, simply our choice... (It all seems to keep coming back to free will, doesn't it?)

### **Why are there so many denominations/branches of Christianity when Christ calls us to be unified as one body?**

To answer this, I want to clarify one thing: in this answer, we're going to ONLY deal with “Christian” denominations, not cults. (Cults would include Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, etc. and they reject the Bible and replace it with their own “holy books”.)

A long time ago, there was one church: the catholic church. Notice that it's a lowercase “c”, because “catholic” means “universal”. In other words, in the beginning of the church age, there was unity.

Then, in 1054 A.D., Michael Cerularius was excommunicated – kicked out – of the Christian church. At that point, because of rising tensions between East and West, the church split into two groups: the Western Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. So, because of religious

disagreements and political issues, the church split. (Source: <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/great-schism/>)

Later on, Martin Luther and John Calvin protested the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1517, Martin Luther nailed his “Ninety-Five Theses” to the Wittenberg Church, and another split began. (A lot of the debate was on the “infallibility” of the Pope. Roman Catholics held the Pope’s words as co-equal with scripture.)<sup>2</sup>

After this, other groups split off of the Protestants for different reasons. Some because an influential leader taught a different style; others because they were offended by the theology. One of the most famous groups, the “Pilgrims” (technically they were “Separatists” or the “Scrooby Congregation”) left the Church of England because of the clothing worn by the priests. (Among other things!)

Even today, churches are splitting for different reasons. My “favorite” was a church split over the decision to put a coat rack in the lobby. Now, in that city, there are two churches: First Church With Coat Rack and First Church Without Coat Rack.

So, why are there different denominations? Because humans are petty, selfish, and seek power; even those who call themselves “Christian”. We will only ever truly have unity when Christ returns and we are wholeheartedly committed to Him.

The follow up question I get to this is usually: Which denomination is the closest to the Bible?

Honestly, I leave that to you to judge for yourself.

- I’ve been in a Catholic Church that was evangelical in nature, preached repentance, and even did an altar call.
- I went to an IFCA Church that preached the need to tithe more because they were “breaking their poor pastor’s heart” and he needed more money.
- I went to a Lutheran Church and was told that God accepted gay people.
- I’ve spent time with Pentecostals who told me that the world was ending at the 2024 Solar Eclipse because of the astrological work they had done. (We’ll skip the fact that God condemns astrology.)
- I’ve been to a nondenominational church that blamed a young girl for the fact their pastor molested her.
- I’ve been to a Greek Orthodox Church and watched people who couldn’t read or write act out the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in such a simple and yet profound way that EVERYONE understood what Christ had done for them.

And the list goes on...and on. For every “bad” church in a denomination, I can point you to a “good” one. We need to be careful about assuming that ALL churches in a denomination are good or bad based on the reputation of the denomination as a whole!

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<sup>2</sup> By the way, there WERE other “protestants” before this. The most famous of which was John Wycliffe who worked with a group to translate the Bible into English for the first time. The Roman Catholic Church was upset that “commoners” had access to the word of god and condemned him! In fact, they burned some of Wycliffe’s supporters for heresy!

If you're looking for a church, no matter what name is on the outside, be sure that what they say on the inside matches what the Bible says!

### **Why did God let my mom do what she did to me?**

To begin with, this question made me cry a little. Why? Because it really IS a brilliant question! Unfortunately, my answer may NOT satisfy you, because I don't know what happened...or why. Even worse, what the Bible says may not be comforting...but let's look at it any way.

The first place to start is way back in the book of Genesis. In chapters one and two, God creates the universe, creates the world, and creates humans. We were made to be in a perfect relationship with God, but God gives humans the option to walk away. In the Garden of Eden, God plants a tree and tells the humans not to eat it because if they do, they will die.

Satan comes in, questions Eve, tells her that God is lying and that eating the fruit will be fine, and then steps back to watch her. What's the result?

*The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. - Genesis 3:6 (NLT)*

Humans CHOSE to sin, to disobey God; and, because of their choice, sin and death entered Creation.

Fast-forward a few hundred years and we find that God has chosen the Nation of Israel to be His special people. He frees them from slavery in Egypt, guides them to a land that He promised to give them, and now, just as they are getting ready to enter the land, Joshua, their leader, has a talk with them:

*“So fear the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD alone. But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.” - Joshua 24:14-15 (NLT)*

Joshua tells them, “Make a choice! You can follow God and live! Or, you can choose to follow some other gods and suffer!” That day, Israel chooses to follow God; but, a short time later, they choose to rebel against God, go their own way, and they suffer for their choice!

Now this may seem like I'm going on a rabbit-trail, but bear with me. You see, God is a God of choices. If God forced us to love Him, would it really be love? No. Why? Because we have no CHOICE in the matter! Let me explain this another way:

If I told my children they had to tell me they loved me or I would strap them in a chair and force them to watch the Barney the Dinosaur show all day until they did, would they say they loved me? Probably! (Well, actually that's pretty much a guarantee!) However, would they say they loved me

because they really DO love me...or because they had no choice?

God gives us a choice. And, because of that, some humans choose...poorly. I don't know what your mom did to you, but it was a choice that she made...and unfortunately you have to bear the pain of it. (If you want help, please come and talk to me!)

But there IS one more part to this answer; and to find it, we need to visit Romans 8. (By the way, if you're a Christian and you've never read this, go read it now!) In verse 28, we find this:

*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. - Romans 8:28 (NLT)*

In other words, if we take the pain in our lives, the troubles we go through, and the hurt that we're living with and give it all to God, then He can -and will – make something good come out of it!

Now, depending on how recently you were hurt, you may not be ready to hear this, but I can tell you that this IS true! How do I know? Well, let me give you two examples:

First, my friend, Beck, worked at Camp with me. One summer, her parents filed for a divorce. Hurt, she came to talk to me. After listening, I pointed her to this verse in Romans 8. She looked at me and said, "How can God make ANYTHING good come out of this?"

At that moment, a camper came into the hallway, looking very upset. I asked them what was wrong, and they said, "My parents told me before I came to Camp that they were getting a divorce. Why would God allow that? Is there anyone that I can talk to about it?"

And Beck, my hero, turned to me, and said, "Shut up!" She then looked at the boy and said, "I can't tell you why God would allow it, but my parents are getting a divorce, too. I would love to talk to you about it, if I can." And the two of them went off together.

In that time, in that place, there was exactly ONE person on the entire Camp who could even begin to understand what this young man was going through...and it required Beck to experience pain so that she could understand the pain of another.

In my own life, I've spent a lot of time being mad at God for letting me be molested as a child. I just couldn't understand why God didn't protect me. Then, one night, I was working with a camper who was out of control. I was ready to yell at him when out of my mouth came, "Who molested you?"

The young man looked at me and said, "How did you know?"

I looked back and said, "Because I was molested, too." The boy burst into tears and we had a long talk because I could understand the pain he was in.

Now, I would NEVER wish for someone to go through pain! But I do know that when I gave my pain to God, He used it to help me help others. I would never wish my past on another human...but I'm grateful to God for what I've been through, because I couldn't do what I do without it.

Maybe, in time, you can reach that point, too. You just have to be willing to give your pain to God...and leave it with God.

If I can help you in ANY way, please let me know!

### **Why do bad things happen to good people?**

This is a very, very difficult question and I'm proud of you for asking it. There are a lot of people who experience bad things in their lives and they simply give up and walk away from God without bothering to find out what's really going on. I'm going to try to answer this here, but I want you to read through ALL of the answer first. If you still have questions, I'd love to have you come talk with me.

To start with, I have some bad news for you: according to the Bible, there are no "good" people!

*All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. - Isaiah 53:6a*

Well, problem solved! We're all bad! And, that's a good enough answer, right? \*sigh\* (I didn't think you'd fall for that...) Unfortunately, that's part of the problem: choice. God allows us to choose to follow Him or choose to walk away. Some people walk very far away and, because of that, others get hurt. Most of the bad things that happen to "good people" happen because humans choose to hurt one another.

Could God stop it? Certainly! Could God force people to behave? Definitely. But it all goes back to the idea that God loves us enough to let us walk away and do our own thing, even if it causes others – or ourselves – to be hurt in the process. We may not like it, but a lot of people end up blaming God for the actions that belong to humans.

There's another thing to consider, though: maybe the "bad things" we go through will help us, or others, to find God. I know in my own life that I've been able to connect with certain teens simply because I can understand the pain that they're going through. I get to counsel them from my own life experience, while others simply tell them what they read about in a book. Which one is more effective? Having someone who's been through some of the bad things you have, or someone who's read about it somewhere along the way? I'll let you decide.

I have a friend who's going through some very tough times right now. I told her that God would use it for His glory. In the middle of her arguing with me about it, a child came up and, out of the blue, described his situation. By some incredible coincidence – God does have a sense of humor – it was the EXACT same situation as my friend was experiencing. She was able to reassure the child and have a conversation that no one else could have had simply because she knew what that child was going through! In fact, if I had to guess, she was the ONLY person who could have done it.

In the end, we never wish for bad things to happen to people; but you have to know that God can take any situation and use it for good if you're only willing to give Him time to prove it to you.

I know this is a short answer to a serious question. If you want to dig deeper, please let me know!

## Why do some people use the Bible as a con artist?

The best answer? You're dealing with humans, and we all make mistakes...sometimes intentionally. Some of the “worst” people in history were people who used the Bible to hurt other people:

- A man named the “Reverend” Jim Jones led his followers to Jonestown, South America and had them poisoned or shot. He also had sex with the different women who followed him, he tried to break up families, told people that he was their “father”, and more. Did he use the Bible? Yes. Could he quote it? Yes. Did he believe it? Not really... (Source: biography.com)
- A man name David Koresh (real name Vernon Howell) taught people he had opened the seven seals of Revelation – something Jesus is supposed to do – and that he had discovered secret knowledge from God. He then proceeded to molest small girls, have sex with women in the compound, and they stockpiled weapons to prepare for the final war. Did he know the Bible? Yes. Could he quote it? Yes. Did he believe it? Not really... (Source: biography.com)

Because of that, you will NEVER hear me say, “Listen only to my words! I know better than all of you!” Instead, what I always say is, “Don't take my word for it; take God's instead.” If you disagree with me, look it up. Don't ever let anyone tell you what God says without taking the time to study it for yourself. If you take the time to check it out, you won't ever have to worry if you're being “conned” or not.

## Why do we die?

Actually, there are two ways that I can answer this one. (That seems to be a trend in a lot of these questions!)

The first one is the Biblical reason. Remember when we talked about humans walking away from God? Well, that happened way back in Genesis chapter two and three, shortly after God created us. Let me show you:

*The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.” - Genesis 2:15-17 (NLT)*

God means that there will be both spiritual death – we're separated from God – and physical death – our bodies will begin to wind down. The fact that we didn't immediately die after Adam and Eve ate the fruit is the first act of grace – God giving us a gift that we don't deserve.

The second answer is the scientific one. This is pretty complex, so make sure you pay attention: we have no idea! Actually, we have about 300 or so ideas, but we aren't sure which one – if any – is actually the right answer!

One theory, though, is kind of quirky. It says that for some reason we seem to have a hard-coded

lifespan that causes us to age and/or die at a certain time. In other words, it's almost like Someone put a limit on how long our bodies could last.

*Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not put up with humans for such a long time, for they are only mortal flesh. In the future, their normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years." - Genesis 6:3 (NLT)*

By the way, please understand that 120 years is not meant to be an absolute, fixed limit. It's not, "You will die IMMEDIATELY when you are 120 years, 0 months, 0 days, 0 hours, 0 minutes, and 0 seconds old!" In modern times we read it to mean that, but the Hebrew isn't setting this down as a law.<sup>3</sup>

So, if someone points out that a person in France lived over 122 years...it's okay! This is a guideline, not a commandment.

### **Why do we have a hard life when following Jesus?**

Whew! This is a HUGE question. In fact, in my opinion, this is one of the best questions that we can ask! The trouble is, I need about 20+ pages to answer this fully. Since I don't have time here, I'm going to give you the "very shortened" version:

Because people hate Jesus.

In John 15, Jesus promise us that we'll have problems:

*"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. - John 15:18-19 (NLT)*

Because we're following Jesus and not the world, the world is going to hate us. We can have an "easy" life by doing whatever the world says, but it will leave us broken and empty. Our true joy can only come through Christ.

Because the world is "fallen".

Sometimes we as Christians think that suffering is unique to us. Unfortunately, it's not... We live in a world filled with sinful people doing sinful things. Our choices have also caused Creation, itself, to fall apart! (Read Romans 8:20-21.) Because of that, bad things happen:

*I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." - John 16:33 (NLT)*

Because "bad things" can bring us closer to God.

Paul tells us this:

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<sup>3</sup> Just a quick note: there ARE people who read this to mean that the Flood was coming in 120 years – not that it has anything to do with an age limit for humans. Within the context, this is also justifiable. I figured I would let you know that not everyone agrees with me on this!

*If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.*

*Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. - 2 Corinthians 12:6-10 (NLT)*

In my own life, I have asthma. When I was young, it almost killed me...repeatedly. Like Paul, I used to pray that God would cure me...but He never did. At times, I was bitter and angry with God. Why would He allow this? I was a Christian! He should make my life easier.

As I get older, though, I've come to realize something: when my lungs don't work, it forces me to slow down and pray. In fact, there are days when sitting and praying is pretty much ALL I can do.

My asthma "encourages" me to spend time with God...and I'm okay with that.

Because "bad things" can help others.

There is a very beautiful verse in Romans 8 that I absolutely love:

*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. - Romans 8:28 (NLT)*

In other words, God will take the bad things we go through and use them for good! The problem is, we have to give the pain to God FIRST and then let Him show us.

I know this firsthand, by the way. I told you I was molested as a child. I literally trained to kill the man who did it. Along the way, I became a Christian and ended up forgiving him, instead; but I always wondered why God would allow me to go through that pain.

One day while working at a camp, I had a young man make a series of bad choices. They called me in to talk to him. Instead of yelling at him, though, I said, "Who molested you?" (I swear God gave me that thought, since I was just ready to yell at him!)

The boy burst into tears and we talked for hours. He told me of abuse that no one else knew. I could relate to him, though, because I had been abused. The pain in my past allowed me to have conversations with him that no one else on that camp could have! God took my past and caused it to work together for good!

Sometimes we have tough times because we can use our past to help others see that they can have a future!

There is a LOT more I could write here, but I'm hoping this is enough for a start. Seriously, if you want more, please come and find me so that we can talk!

### **Why do we have to fold our hands when we pray?**

The simple answer is: we don't! In the churches I went to growing up, they will tell us to fold our hands, bow our heads, and close our eyes. Why? Because that way we weren't distracted and weren't poking each other, either!

In Bible times, there were different ways that people prayed:

#### Jesus looks up:

*So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, thank you for hearing me..." - John 11:41 (NLT)*

#### The Tax Collector looks down:

*"But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.'" - Luke 18:13 (NLT)*

#### The Psalmist kneels:

*Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD our maker... - Psalm 95:6 (NLT)*

#### Ezekiel falls on his face:

*While I was still prophesying, Pelatiah son of Benaiah suddenly died. Then I fell face down on the ground and cried out, "O Sovereign LORD, are you going to kill everyone in Israel?" - Ezekiel 11:13 (NLT)*

#### Paul tells Timothy to lift hands:

*In every place of worship, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy. - 1 Timothy 2:8 (NLT)*

Based on all of this, do we "have" to fold our hands? No. Is there only one way to pray? No. In fact, the position of your body matters less to God than the position of your heart.

**Barry's Note:** PLEASE do NOT close your eyes to pray while driving! I knew someone who did that once, and I thought I was going to go see Jesus right then and there!

### **Why do we pray publicly and in groups as Jesus says we should in private?**

This comes from Matthew 6:

*"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind*

*you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.” - Matthew 6:5-6 (NLT)*

This is a section from the “Sermon on the Mount”. In this sermon, Jesus covers a LOT of different topics, including this one.

At first glance, Jesus seems to be telling people to go and pray in private, right? Actually, look closer! Why are the people praying in public? They’re doing it so that people will notice them and admire how spiritual they are! They’re not praying to strengthen their relationship with God; they’re praying to improve their public image!

Jesus points out – rightfully so – that this behavior is not God-honoring. To counter the extreme example of people praying for public adoration; Jesus basically takes it to the other end of the spectrum and says, “Rather than focus on others, pray in such a way that you focus on God!”

This isn’t meant to be literal – although there’s nothing wrong with praying in private. Instead, it’s meant to show opposite actions and their results.

If you want more verse on Christians praying together, check out: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 18:19-20, Luke 9:28, Acts 1:13-14, Acts 2:42, Acts 12:12, 2 Corinthians 1:11, James 5:14-16, etc. (Acts actually has a LOT of verses about corporate – group – prayer.)

### **Why do we worship? How do you worship?**

This one is kind of fun to try to answer. Why? Because we have to start with what worship is NOT before we can define what it IS!

First, worship is not just a band playing music while a singer repeats the same chorus over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over – you get the picture – again! It’s not long, drawn-out prayers that people stop listening to after the first three hours! It’s not even something you have to do at a church!

Worship is when we focus on God and God alone. It’s not about us, it’s about Him! Jesus tells us:

*But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” - John 4:23-24 (NLT)*

In other words, it’s not about a building, it’s about focusing our thoughts, our feelings, all of who we are on God! Let me show you a quote I like:

*The word "spirit," here, stands opposed to rites and ceremonies, and to the pomp of external worship. It refers to the "mind," the "soul," the "heart." They shall worship God with a sincere "mind;" with the simple offering of gratitude and prayer; with a desire to glorify him, and without external pomp and splendor. Spiritual worship is that where the heart is offered to God, and where we do not depend on external forms for*

*acceptance. (Source: Barnes' Notes On The Bible)*

In other words, we remove the distractions, take intentional time to spend with God, we seek Him, and we focus on Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. It's not about a location, it's not about a "service", and it's not about rituals – although all of these can be a part of worship! Instead, it's about us seeking a deeper relationship with God.

So, how do we do this? Well, there are about 80 billion options, and these can include:

- Being Quiet
- Birdwatching
- Doing "Quiet Retreats"
- Praying
- Reading The Bible
- Stargazing
- Singing Songs
- Taking A Hike
- Talking About God With Others
- Watching Sunrise / Sunset

Worship is literally any time that you slow down, pay attention to God (and His Creation) and focus your thoughts on Him.

If you wanted a more personal answer for, "How do you worship?", I can tell you my two favorite ways:

First, I love to lay outside in Winter and listen to the snow falling. In that moment, staring up at the sky, focusing on the world around me, I feel all the "clutter" fall away and I get to listen for God more easily.

Second, I love to sit on the shores of Lake Superior, not saying a word for the entire day; instead, just watching the waves roll in and thinking about the awesome God who made the waters. It gives me plenty of time to think, to pray, and to spend time with God without distractions.

Hope that helps!

### **Why does everyone talk about the love of God but not show it?**

This is a very tough question, because I'm assuming that you've been hurt by someone who calls themselves a "Christian". The short answer here is simply this: because we're humans. I know of times in my life when I have said and done things I shouldn't have. During those times, people may have known I was a Christian, but I sure wasn't acting like someone who is following after Jesus!

Another reason is because there are people who know a lot ABOUT God, but still never have given their lives to Him. When I say this, most people think of cult leaders. While that's true, there are people who have gone to church for years, who have learned to say the right things, but who have never asked God to forgive them or chosen to follow Him. (This happens in EVERY church!)

Jesus tells us of a scene with some of these people:

*"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*

*Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'” - Matthew 7:21-23 (NLT)*

Going to church doesn't mean that you've got it right; just like being a Christian doesn't mean you'll never screw up. If you're asking about people here who are acting like that, I would love to have you come and talk with me about it. If there is something we can do better, we want to!

### **Why does God use people to help people?**

Could God intervene and help people? Certainly. We see Him do it with the Israelites who are fleeing from Egypt, we see His presence in their battles as they seek to take the Promised Land and we see Him actually sending armies to defend those who believe in Him. One of my favorite passages is in the book of 2 Kings:

*So one night the king of Aram sent a great army with many chariots and horses to surround the city. When the servant of the man of God got up early the next morning and went outside, there were troops, horses, and chariots everywhere. “Oh, sir, what will we do now?” the young man cried to Elisha.*

*“Don’t be afraid!” Elisha told him. “For there are more on our side than on theirs!” Then Elisha prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes and let him see!” The LORD opened the young man’s eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire. - 2 Kings 6:14-17 (NLT)*

The King of Aram wants to capture the prophet Elisha. The only problem? Elisha has God on his side and because of that, the king is a little outgunned! Oops!

In the New Testament, we see Jesus who goes around and helps people. In fact, one of the things that made Jesus so unpopular with the religious leaders is because He actually CARED for the people of Israel!

*Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus’ enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man’s hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath.*

*Then he said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus. - Mark 3:1-2, 5b-6 (NLT)*

Skip the fact that Jesus healed the man. The leaders were more upset that Jesus dared to break one of their rules than they are impressed by the healing! What's wrong with this picture?

We worship a God that loves people and wants to protect and heal them. If that's the case, then why does He use people to help others? It's because we're called to follow after Jesus and to be like Him. If Jesus reached out to the sick and hurting, shouldn't His followers be doing the same thing? Isn't that

a way we can show the world what we really believe?

In fact, Jesus tells us just that in John:

*“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” - John 13:34-35 (NLT)*

Why does God use people to do His work? Because it's the best way we can show the world what God is really like, by loving them and caring for them!

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