

# A Few Words about Charlottesville For the Church and For the Nation

This is the antithesis of the Kingdom of God. Let this fact take root deep within us. God's kingdom is every tribe and every tongue worshipping the Jewish Messiah. It looks nothing like white men with torches chanting "blood and soil" and asserting their significance. According to Paul in Galatians the gospel unites different races and obliterates ethnic pride. This, like all assertions of ethnic superiority, is evil.

The church needs to address this and do so with more than tweets. Wisely, the Southern Baptists condemned this kind of thing this summer. Just about all the evangelical leaders to whom I listen have been vocal in their condemnation. This is good, but for the most part these are just words. I would like to see real racial reconciliation like what Paul talked about in Galatians 3.

I would like to see the end of black churches, the end of white churches, the end of Hispanic churches. I long to see Christian worship to be so intrinsically linked to racial unity that we couldn't imagine one without the other. If this were the case, everyone who witnessed the actions of these terrorists would know: these are obviously not Christians. Sadly, too many ignorantly associate this with Christianity.

This is the antithesis of America. We are a nation of political ideals, not ethnic pride. Our nation has had plenty of white supremacy in its past, but it was not founded on ethnic or religious lines. It was founded on the inalienable rights of all men. If we take the Declaration of Independence and Constitution seriously, our nation was created to protect

our liberties and to establish the equality of all people before the law. Yet, I'm seeing people forsaking our sacred ideals and doing "hail Hitlers" in the street. Seriously, I cannot believe that this kind of thing goes on in the land that sacrificed so much to defeat this tyrant.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Hitler has become the ultimate hyperbole and comparisons to him are used far too often to denounce political enemies. The conscious decision by the Charlottesville protestors to associate with the Nazi war machine, however, makes this a chilling, but fitting comparison. As a nation, we seem to be reliving 1930s Europe, where it seemed like the world would be won by one of only two options: fascists or communists. Who's it going to be 2017 America: Hitler or Stalin? Maybe we should insist on better options. Maybe we can unleash hell on the one and still tear down the walls of the other.

America may fail us. Certainly, it will not last forever. How long can a Republic last when its citizens lack virtue and know nothing about how it works? As a history teacher I will strive to promote civic knowledge, virtue, and commitment to those American ideals that transcend race, class, and gender. I can only have so much impact.

The Church will not fail. It will march into hell and take no prisoners. It will do this because it is not maintained by its own might but by the will of God. Pastors, empower your church to be The Church. Call it to be the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-generational eternal body united in celebrating the Kingship of Jesus. You can do nothing of greater impact.

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# The Spoken Unspoken Prayer Request

*"I have an unspoken."*

Then why did you just speak it?

The "unspoken" prayer request (pause and meditate on that phrase for a few minutes) has bothered me for years. If I have such a sensitive, secretive topic, then I can pray for it without the announcement that I have one. If I do not think I should share it with a group of people, then I shouldn't. If it is a request that is burdensome enough to share with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, then I need to say what it is. I don't have to share all the details to ask for prayer. I can ask my small group (Sunday School class, Life Group, Connection Group, Whatever-Clever-Name-You-Want Group) to pray about a big decision that I have to make. This is not the "unspoken" I am referring to. I am talking about those generic "I have an unspoken" comments. What is their purpose?

I liken this to a child who is supposed to keep a secret. A true secret-keeper will not give others the indication that he or she has knowledge of the secret. But as all parents have experienced, the first time you tell your child a secret, he has to advertise that he knows something that others do not know. This advertisement, this announcement of the secret knowledge, is too revealing. In essence, it is no longer a complete secret once people know that there is one being kept.

So why ask for prayer for an unspoken reason (that's actually not unspoken)?

**Could it be pride?**

*"This is so important, this information I am privy to, that I can't share it with anyone."*

*"This very personal issue is so private, that I can't tell you about it."*

*"But that doesn't mean you can't 'pray' about this thing you don't know about. Because God knows."*

It's true that God knows. It's also true that none of the rest of us have to know about it. If it is wise to not share about the request, then don't. Sometimes, I think it's good to just be quiet.

**Is it really God-honoring to share an unspoken request?**

Request sharing should be a time of honesty, authenticity, and brokenness between like-minded, sinning disciples of Christ. Perhaps the sinning saints are hurting because we are sojourners and living in a hostile world brings trouble. ("In this world you will have trouble," Jesus warned.) Perhaps the purpose is based in praise, and we see a piece of home here on earth because loving God and loving others will bring blessing. Perhaps we share to adore the One who is redeeming us for a greater purpose. I don't think unspoken requests accomplish any of these.

**Do we see any examples in the Bible of the unspoken request?**

Prayers in the Bible are specific: prayers that the gospel would be shared boldly; prayers for protection and safety and holiness; prayers of thankfulness. However, even the prayers recorded in the Bible do not share all the minutia of every request. We are even instructed to avoid wordiness and repetition (Matthew 6:7). Imagine Paul (or Peter or James or John, etc.) writing, "Dear Brothers and Sisters, I have an unspoken." It seems strange.

These are only three reasons why I see no benefit in sharing unspoken requests: they are often rooted in pride; they do not serve a God-honoring purpose; and there is no biblical precedent.

What do you think? Am I missing something?

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# Peter, Walking on Water, and the Trust of a Drowning Man

I've been thinking a lot about Peter and trust. Not faith necessarily, but trust. And it all stems from a thought I had when I read the story found in Matthew 14:22-33.

My guess is, most of you know the story and know it well. It is a favorite for Sunday School teachers. Preachers love it as well. There is a lot to be gleaned from the story of Jesus walking on the water. There are the various dynamics at play: fear, doubt, faith, and trust. There is Jesus, walking on the wind-swept waters in a display of power that rivals almost any miracle recorded in Scripture. There are the disciples, cowering in the boat, terrified of the "ghost" that is approaching them. There is Peter, touched by the presence of Jesus, trusting enough to take a step of faith out of the boat. And then there is Peter, overcome by his fear of the winds and waves, sinking into the water.

This most recent time I encountered the story, I was struck with a moment that I have never really noticed before, and it dramatically altered how I view this story.

In my experience, Jesus walking on the water has always been used to teach about doubt and faith. There they were, sitting in the boat, surrounded by the storm, and they see him – Jesus, walking on the water and coming their way. Let me repeat that. In the middle of a storm the disciples see Jesus, their teacher, literally walking on the water. By this point, they had already witnessed various miracles. They knew Jesus had power over the natural world. They had to – they had just seen him multiply the fish and the bread to feed

thousands. And now, here he is, walking on the water as if on land. Yet they are still terrified of the winds, the waves, and the “ghost” walking towards them on the water.

And then he calls to them with words of comfort and peace. At this point in his spiritual walk, Peter’s words were far bolder than his actions, so he asks Jesus to command him to walk out to him. Jesus simply says, “Come.” Peter then does something that should both inspire and shame all of us: He steps out on the water and walks towards Jesus. That is faith. That is complete trust in Jesus. I am moved and my spirit is piqued when I read that. Peter knew the sea, it was his life and livelihood. He knew that man was not made to walk on the water. But he saw and heard Jesus and he trusted fully.

Then he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the storm. This is the moment in the story that most teachers make their big point. And it is a very good point. We should always keep our eyes on Jesus. We should take him at his word. We should trust completely. We should have that mustard seed faith and move whatever mountains are in our way.

We don’t live in that reality though. Most of us don’t, at least. I have never moved a mountain and I don’t know of anyone who has. We struggle with trusting fully and living by faith. We are more like the other disciples, huddling in the boat waiting to see what happens.

So the contrast is simple: We should be like Peter before he took his eyes off the Lord. We should not be like Peter who allowed fear to guide his actions. That is a good lesson. It is a simple, yet powerful truth. But I see another kind of trust in that passage.

I see Peter sinking deep into the stormy waters, knowing death was quickly coming to take him. I see Peter realizing that his faith was not strong enough to continue walking on that water. That could have been the end of the story. But that is not how

Jesus let it end. As Peter is flailing in the water, he calls out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!" Jesus walks to Peter and takes his hand. Peter could have looked at that hand and thought to himself, "Thanks but no thanks Jesus. I don't see how it's possible for you to keep me from drowning, seeing as how you are literally standing on water. Why don't you get the boat to come over here and then I can hold on to that. I know that boat is made to float, unlike us." But Peter trusted in the power of Jesus. He didn't trust in that power to work in his own life, not yet, but he knew without hesitation that Jesus could and would save him. He knew that Jesus could reach down and pull him out of the water, even though that made no earthly sense. His faith was small, but it was enough to trust in his Saviour.

Most days, that kind of trust is all I can muster. I hope and yearn for the other kind, the fuller kind. But on days where that trust is a faint glimmer, I hope I trust enough to simply take the hand of Jesus when he offers to help me. Most days, I am okay with having the trust of a drowning man.

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## Sometimes He Calms the Sea

African-American pastor and songwriter of the past century, Charles Tindley, used a common metaphor of the time to reference the trials, tribulations, dangers, and snares of the Christian life: "When the storms of life are raging, stand by me...when the world is tossing me like a ship upon the sea, thou who rulest wind and water, stand by me." [1. "Stand By Me" Charles A. Tindley]

Another song writer-poet expressed similar sentiments: "Jesus

Savior, pilot me, over life's tempestuous sea, unknown waves before me roll, hiding rocks and treacherous shoal, wondrous sovereign of the sea, Jesus Savior, pilot me." [2. "Jesus, Savior Pilot Me" Edward Hopper]

Songwriter Scott Krippayne, echoed these thoughts in a song he wrote in 1995:

*All who sail the sea of faith  
Find out before too long  
How quickly blue skies can grow dark  
And gentle winds grow strong  
Suddenly fear is like white water  
Pounding on the soul  
Still we sail on knowing  
That our Lord is in control  
Sometimes He calms the storm  
With a whispered peace be still  
He can settle any sea  
But it doesn't mean He will  
Sometimes He holds us close  
And lets the wind and waves go wild  
Sometimes He calms the storm  
And other times He calms His child"* [3. "Sometimes He Calms the Storm" Scott Krippayne]

Traveling by boat or ship, or being out on the ocean, rivers, or lakes was a dangerous thing for many centuries, since ancient times. Storms could arise without notice, and the wind, strong waves, thunder, and lightning menaced travelers, and could capsize a ship and cause many deaths. This has been symbolic of trouble in the Christian life. Storms symbolize illness and disease, financial disasters, broken relationships, and anything else in life that threatens us, either physically or emotionally. Can God not step in and save the day? Can he not send a miracle our way?

In Mark 4, the disciples on the Sea of Galilee found



themselves caught in a sudden storm, helpless and in grave danger, while Jesus was asleep in the boat. They woke him, frightened out of their wits, and He stood, extended His hand, rebuked the wind, and said "peace, be still." Immediately the storm ended. Instantly. There was a "great calm." Jesus then rebuked his followers for their lack of faith. Sure, He can calm storms. He's God.

A few years later, Paul was traveling as a prisoner to Rome, on board a ship in the Mediterranean Sea. Suddenly, a Euroclydon, a powerful, cyclone-type wind arose, and for the next two weeks the ship was tossed and battered until all hope of survival was gone. But suddenly Paul appeared and said to all on board with him: "The God whose I am, and whom I serve, has appeared to me." He gave Paul the peace he needed, and the assurance that all would be well (Acts 27:23). But they had to ride out the storm and suffer shipwreck. Life's like that sometimes.

Yet another song repeats for us the same truth:

*Sometimes He calms the storm sometimes He calms me  
Sometimes the storm still rages on but I feel the sweetest  
peace  
It's such a joy to know that my Lord knows just what I need  
Sometimes He calms the storm sometimes He calms me*[4. "He Calms me" sung by the McKameys]

Here are some lessons we can learn.

God is sovereign over every storm life brings our way. He is capable of doing the miraculous; healing, provision, removing obstacles, and certainly doesn't mind His child asking for those things. He may not do what we wish He would, but He always, always, always, will be with us, and will speak peace to our heart if we call upon Him. "Therefore, we will not fear..." (Psalm 46:2) At the end of the day, He will "get us to the other side."

Here's the point. We all face storms. God can miraculously still them, and sometimes will, but often we will have to go through them. However, even in the storm He is with us, can speak peace to our heart. The loss of our beautiful daughter-in-law two years ago – my health challenges the past few years – standing with friends and family during severe trials. I'm so glad He is there. The song by *Casting Crowns*, "Praise You in This Storm," states it beautifully:

*And I'll praise you in this storm*

*And I will lift my hands*

*That you are who you are*

*No matter where I am*

*And every tear I've cried*

*You hold in your hand*

*You never left my side*

*And though my heart is torn*

*I will praise you in this storm*[5. Praise You in This Storm"]

Mark Hall and Bernie Herms (Casting Crowns)]

Prayer: Father, even now be with your dear children who are caught in one of life's raging storms, whatever it might be. Please calm the storm, according to your will, or please calm them, and assure them of your love and presence. In the powerful name of Christ, Amen.

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## [What About Those Who've Never Heard of Jesus?](#)

***"You're in some remote part of the earth and you never heard the name of Jesus, you cannot get to Heaven, you think?"***  
[Oprah Winfrey]

According to the Joshua Project, there are about 3,000 people groups in the world that have essentially zero Christian contact. It is nearly impossible to determine the exact number, but based on this we can safely assume there are millions, and perhaps billions, of people who have never heard the name of Jesus.

When you juxtapose this with what the Bible teaches about how a person is saved from eternal damnation, it can cause cognitive dissonance to the Christian mind.

And trying to reconcile basic New Testament theology with the practical reality of where the Gospel hasn't been preached makes for intense discussion and debate. The quote from Oprah above happened [during her former show in a lively conversation between her, her guest speaker and a woman in the audience](#). Oprah presents a "fair" view of those who've never heard, that God cares more about their heart than if they've heard of Jesus. This is a popular view, even within the evangelical church. But is it correct?

I want to tackle this issue, but not in a "Here is the final and authoritative answer to problem" way. The Bible speaks to this, but not in an expositional manner. In other words, I can't give you an interpretation of one passage that clears it all up.

No, I think this mystery is better viewed as a puzzle of about ten pieces that have to be seen together in order to see a more complete image. Yet even with the truths I present below, I am still not advocating an answer that ends the discussion. This issue is far too complex. But these truths do help me relieve the dissonance to a great level and help start the discussion. They may leave you with more questions than answers. That will not offend me. I hope it encourages you to add to the dialogue.

But to at least get it started, I offer these as things that I am absolutely convinced the Bible teaches. If I can't have a final authoritative answer to this issue, I can at least focus on things that are clear and go from there. Here are the ten:

**1. Jesus is the only way to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).**

**2. Those who do not follow Jesus end up in Hell (John 3:36).**

These two are the basis for why the question of "What about those who've never heard?" exists. Without them there is no issue.

**3. God is just (Deuteronomy 4:32; Romans 3:5b-6).**

Whatever the answer to the question is, I think we have to believe that God is fair. This matters because the issue at its heart is that it is unfair to condemn someone for knowledge they do not have. But the Bible describes God as a just judge.

**4. God is not far from anyone (Acts 17:26-27).**

This matters because with this topic it appears we are dealing with people who are far from the truth about God, when in reality no one is actually far from God. Note that Paul in these verses is dealing precisely with where people live geographically.

**5. God can be known through the created world so men are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).**

Even without the Bible and a Christian witness, every person that lives now is accountable to God in some sense because they can see him through creation.

**6. God can be known from human morality (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 2:14-15).**

Similarly, because we know right from wrong and that a general

sense of justice transcends culture and time, we know there has to be a standard of right and wrong we are all accountable to. We know there is a God because His law is ingrained within us.

**7. God desires that everyone be saved (2 Peter 3:9).**

**8. God demands repentance from everyone to be saved (Acts 17:30).**

These two are crucial because the first one teaches us about God's heart on this issue and the second, at least in theory, eliminates exceptions. Like those who've never heard. If there is an exception there better be a clear explanation in the Bible.[1. A shout out here to the students at a leadership conference I helped lead in 2014 for asking tough questions in a Q&A after this presentation. This event caused me to add an addendum, footnoted here, to this presentation on the concept of an age of accountability. Logically it is hard to believe God demands repentance from a 3-month old baby. Biblically, we can see in Isaiah God acknowledging that a particular child is not old enough to know right from wrong; we see Nathan telling David he will see his deceased newborn in Heaven one day and that Jesus loved children with qualification. Does this mean, biblically, that there is an age of accountability? I am not 100% convinced this is so. Yet I believe it has to exist for God to be fair. This opens up a can of worms of course about what the age is and I only bring it up here because if it exists, I would guess it is at least possible that children are accountable at a younger age in a culture where they hear the Gospel more often than in a place where Jesus' name is never even spoken.]

**9. God can get a missionary to a searching person (Acts 10:1-48).**

If a person is living a God-fearing life with no knowledge of Jesus, God can get a missionary to them. It is true that

sometimes people groups do not have missionaries because people do not go, but sometimes they do not because they are hostile to Christianity.

#### **10. God can reveal himself in dreams to lost people (Genesis 41; Daniel 2).**

This is huge, especially in the Muslim world. There are many stories I encourage you to read about it if you have not. You can begin [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

So again, without presuming that these ten things tie the issue into a nice little bow, I present them as giving us at least a picture of how we can begin reconciling the tensions of God's fairness, the necessity of confessing Christ, and the lack of Gospel witness in thousands of people groups. I doubt I will ever feel completely confident in any answer to the question and I confess we may be asking the wrong question here. But at least it catapults us to search the Scriptures to learn more about who God is and what he is like, and fosters discussion on a complex topic that exercises the mind. That is rarely a bad thing.

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## **Does God Have a Specific Will for My Life?**

*I know O Lord, that a man's life is not his own, that it is not for him to direct his steps. [Jeremiah 10:23]*

I graduated college in May of 2002. By January of that year I knew I was going to move to Chicago.

And I have zero doubt that I can say it this way and not be presumptuous or pious: I knew it was God's will for my life.

I don't think I even thought of it in terms of "God's *specific* will". I don't think I would have said, "If I don't go to Chicago I will be disobeying." But I knew it was in some sense the right thing to do. And I was so convinced of this that no other option was even considered.

And I suppose I thought at the time that God worked with everyone similarly. So it was surely a God thing that my first roommate in Chicago was Joshua Crowe, who felt pretty much the opposite as me in his approach to God's will. He felt that upon graduating college he had choices. He could have moved to Japan or France or up the road a few miles and still been perfectly within God's plan for his life. He chose Chicago because it was, to him, a wise next step to do an internship in an international city before eventually moving to a different country.

And being the young and passionate guys we were, we argued about it. We discussed specific will vs. general will so much that it soon became a joke and we laugh about it to this day and rib each other subtly via text messages and social media. But I owe it to Josh for helping me think through this biblically and changing my mind about a lot of this topic.

I still, to this day, believe God's will for my life was Chicago and I would even say it was specific. Any belief about God in my worldview must be backed up by Scripture and I can easily see God in both Old (Jonah 1:1-2) and New Testaments (Acts 20:22) telling people to go somewhere specifically and even on occasion God saying to *not* go somewhere (Acts 16:6-7). That sounds similar to how God led me to where I have been for

the last 15 years.

For discussion's sake, I would even say this is how God worked in leading me to marriage. While I do not believe for one second that God only has one person for every person, it is crazy to look back on my time as a single person where I could have easily ended up with someone before I met Kayla and things beyond the realm of logic kept it from happening. It was confusing to go through, but now I can see that God wanted me to wait and to marry Kayla. She feels the same, about our marriage and God's will in general.

Yet, I now understand that God does not deal with everyone this way. Biblically and in my conversations with dozens of Christians, I have seen over and over that God often gives people choices and using wisdom to make decisions is how God operates in their lives. Josh and I eventually came to the conclusion that God is far too complex to work with every person the same way. Some people may be similar to Jonah in that God says, "Go to this place" or Isaac in that God says, "This is whom I want you to marry" and others like Nehemiah see a need somewhere and go to help fix it without some great call of God, or David marrying Abigail simply because she was a woman of God[1. This is somewhat off topic, so I'll relegate it to a footnote. It is supremely interesting to me how little the Bible says about finding a mate in the matter of specifics. The Bible's narratives feature cultures so different than ours that trying to glean anything about dating vs courting, or whatever method we may consider to be best, is nearly impossible. The doctrinal parts of the Bible are equally as silent on specifics, as far as I know. So I am incredibly hesitant to endorse any one view on how to find a mate. Whatever you want to call the time of getting to know a person before marriage should be selfless and God-honoring and I am convinced there are many terms we could use to describe it.].

Josh also helped me see issues in this debate that really



moved me towards a more reasonable middle ground that I described above and by this point I've discovered many wise Christians have experienced the same frustrations when this topic comes up. First, he told me it is maddening to think that there are needs all over the world and that some Christians are so busy waiting on a great sign from God to go that they wait and wait and wait and never go. Mission works struggle and churches go without help because everyone is waiting for God to call them specifically and this becomes a seemingly spiritual yet potentially lame excuse for why people do not go.

Trust me, I get this complaint and find it valid.

Secondly, and equally as relevant, Josh told me that if you see God's will as something specific, then it become a gigantic point of stress when you have to make a major decision, be it marriage, a college major, job or location. What if you get it wrong?

So these Josh-Gowdy conversations in the early 2000s revolutionized my counsel to young people on this topic. By God's grace I have had the opportunity to talk with hundreds of young adults in my life on the cusp of making major life decisions. And my advice has been much more balanced, and hence, biblical. I tell them it may be that God calls you to some place or person specifically and if he does it will not be ambiguous. If God works the way he has with me, there will be zero doubt about His will. If he does not and you do not sense any specific leading, you should use wisdom from the Bible and godly counselors to go out and do something that fulfills the biblical mandates of serving, evangelizing and discipling people while in Christian community. I would venture to guess that God far more often works the second way and I recommend a book by Kevin DeYoung called *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will*. In either case, knowing God's will should not be stressful at all. Actually doing it may cause anguish, but knowing it

should be simple.

So I will wrap up my thoughts on this with something I learned from Nehemiah 1 this past Spring as I prepared to give devotions to visiting mission groups to my church this summer. Nehemiah saw a need in Jerusalem and he spent time fasting, weeping and praying before he did anything else. When he prayed, his heart was so filled with Scripture it overflowed from him as he prayed. Let me assure anyone reading this: if Christians at any point in their lives are so in tune with the Bible they can pray it naturally and are so moved by the injustice around them that they fast, weep and pray “day and night” (Nehemiah 1:6, see also Luke 18:1-8) for a period of time in response, then knowing God’s will be the easiest thing there is. Knowing God is primary. Being broken over the things that break his heart is a result. God’s will should absolutely come out of that and if it does, I doubt words like “specific” and “general” will matter to any significant level.

So my views on this matter are constantly developing and we at REO welcome feedback so please comment below if you so desire.

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## [Fanny Crosby: The 19th Century Wonder Woman](#)

I admit that I have not seen the new Wonder Woman movie yet, but I have seen a viral video in which it inspired a brave young lass to dress up...as something...and attempt all manner of swordplay with a toy sword and awkward acrobatics. I have also

read lots of reviews of Wonder Woman; you can read Phill Lytle's excellent review right [here](#). While I fully intend to see Wonder Wonder, all the hubbub has put me in mind of an actual and probably far greater Wonder Woman of days gone by. While Wonder Woman herself is a daughter of Zeus, I am referring to a daughter of the one true God in heaven. I refer to no other than one of the greatest hymnists who has ever lived: Fanny Crosby. Fanny is mainly known by history as a great blind hymnist, but it might be that she would not want to be remembered for only her hymn writing. She regarded this as only part of her life and ministry, but certainly not all of it. And she was right to think that; her life and ministry included much more. During her life in addition to her status as The Queen of Gospel Music, she would serve as a teacher of the blind, a much in demand public speaker, and a full time minister among the homeless.

### **The Early Years**

Crosby was born on March 24, 1820 in Southeast Putnam County, New York, in a small community called Gayville. About six weeks after she was born Crosby caught a bad cold. In the absence of the community doctor, a well-meaning neighbor stepped in claiming to have medical knowledge and know-how. He applied hot poultices (wet washcloths) to Fanny's eyes in a misguided attempt to draw out the infection. The man succeeded only in permanently blinding her. (At this time her parents didn't know it was permanent and fully believed her sight would return after a time.)

When Fanny was almost one her father John Crosby died. That is when Fanny and her mother Mercy moved in with Fanny's grandmother, Eunice Crosby. Eunice Crosby would do much of the mothering of Fanny until she was five. During this time she did everything she could to strengthen her granddaughter's powers of memory and to help her see the world without eyes. As an adult, Fanny would recall how "Grandma...brought the Bible to me, and me to the Bible. The stories of the Holy Book came

from her lips and entered my heart and took deep root there” (This is My Story, This is My Song, Fanny Crosby).

### **The Formative Years**

When Fanny was about five her mother took her to New York to see Dr. Valentine Mott, a famous eye doctor. After inspecting Fanny, he informed Mrs. Crosby her daughter would never see again. This devastated Mrs. Crosby. However, Fanny herself was secretly relieved. She would never be able to see her blindness as anything but a gift from God.

Shortly after this disappointing visit Fanny’s mother acquired a job in North Salem, Westchester County just south of Gayville. They still lived close enough to Gayville that Eunice Crosby was able to visit several times a week, but when Fanny was eight or nine they moved again after her mother landed a job in Ridgefield, Connecticut. This was much too far away for her grandmother to come visit all the time.

During these years, God had another kind caretaker took Eunice Crosby’s place in Fanny’s spiritual and mental education. We know this goodly individual only as Mrs. Hawley. Under Mrs. Hawley’s care by ten years of age Fanny could recite by memory the Pentateuch, Proverbs, the four Gospels, numerous poems, and portions of a number of books. Her mental library would only grow as she got older. Eventually, she did not have to have someone read the Bible to her; she could just recite any passage she wanted. Fanny never thought this an extraordinary feat. She sincerely believed that a blind person could do everything a person with sight could do—and sometimes even better. In one of her autobiographies she says, “It has always been my favorite theory that the blind can accomplish nearly everything that may be done by those who can see. Do not think that those deprived of physical vision are shut out from the best that earth has to offer her children” (Fanny Crosby, *Memories of Eighty Years*).

From an early age she was developing an extraordinarily

descriptive mind and a keen writing ability. She wrote her very first poem when she was eight. When she was in her teens she submitted works of poetry to a nearby paper. This paper was published by the soon to be famous P.T. Barnum. It was also during these formative Ridgefield years that Fanny's desire for formal education began to grow.

### **The Student Years**

In 1834 Fanny and her mom left Ridgefield and returned to Westchester County. In November of that same year they first saw an advertisement for the New York Institution for the Blind. On March 3, 1835, Fanny set off for New York with a traveling companion to enter the institute. After enrolling in and beginning attendance of the school, Crosby quickly became known among the faculty, staff, and student body for her poetry. It was during these early student years that she first became well respected among the literary community of New York and in demand for her poetry skills.

A superintendent of the school named Mr. Jones foresaw the danger of this still young student being ruined by vanity from all the high praise. He therefore cautioned her against letting this vanity get the best of her. At the same time he commanded her to not write poetry for the next three months. He did this partly to temper her growing vanity and partly to test her commitment to writing poetry. After proving herself (and learning to temper her vanity) she was encouraged to write to her heart's content. This is when a literary mentor named Hamilton Murray stepped in. Murray was a member of the Board of Managers of the institution who had great writing sensibilities and skill. He took her under his wing and taught her to write better. With his guidance, Crosby was able to branch out into other areas of writing. For instance, with his help she put her mind to writing poetry for campaigns and other political events.

## **The Teaching Years**

In 1843, Fanny graduated from the institute. During that same year she became a teacher there. It was also during that same year that her health began to decline somewhat. Nevertheless, she still took a number of students to on planned trip to Washington D.C. While there, she recited some of her poetry to the politicians. This trip to Washington was such a success that Crosby would later take a second group of students to the U.S. capitol.

By 1845, she was gradually getting more and more into song lyric writing. During that year a man named George F. Roots came to the school to teach music. In 1853, the two composed a cantata called "The Flower Queen."

Fanny was also began publishing books of poetry during these teaching years. In 1844 she published her first official book of poems: "The Blind Girl and Other Poems." This book also contained her very first hymn which she called "An Evening Hymn." In 1851, she would publish another book of poetry called "Monterey and Other Poems."

Some really big events happened in Fanny's life in between these two books, in 1848 and 1849, the land was stricken by cholera. Like thousands throughout the country, many of the students died. It was so bad that during August of 1848, Crosby was ordered to retire to the country so she too would not get sick. This was not an uncommon practice at this time; many city dwellers were departing the city to avoid the close quarters that fostered the disease. She did retire to the country, and it was not only a salvation for her physical self; it was a life changer for her spiritual self as well. During her time away from the institution, she received a full knowledge of Jesus Christ. This was not something that had just happened all of a sudden. Several years earlier in 1845 she had first met her spiritual mentor, Theodore Camp. He was instrumental in bringing her to Jesus on November 20, 1850 at

a revival at the Broadway Methodist Tabernacle.

### **The Latter Years**

Fanny met her future husband, Alexander Van Alstyne when he was a student at the institution in 1855. (He was 11 years younger than her.) After he graduated from school, he became a teacher and became engaged to Fanny. Three years later the couple resigned and very shortly thereafter got married.

Little is known regarding their married life, but there are three facts that are pretty clear: First, although very amicable and still doing some things together, they lived apart and had separate lives for the majority of their married life. Second, a few years after they were married they had a daughter who only lived for less than a day. Third, they would remain married until he died on July 18, 1902.

In 1858, the year she had resigned from teaching and gotten married, the stage of her hymnist career was set. During this year Fanny published "A Wreath of Columbia's Flowers." This would be her final book of poems before starting to write hymns. This next phase of her writing career was instigated in December 1863 after she was asked to write a hymn for the Dutch Reformed Church. She did so well on this project that an arrangement was made for her to meet the famous hymnist William B. Bradbury on February 2 of the next year. A historic years-long collaboration ensued. It was not long afterward that she became known to evangelists and pastors on both sides of the Atlantic as Aunt Fanny and the Queen of Gospel Music. Many of these ministers commonly used her work in altar calls. The world famous evangelistic team Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey utilized her songs in this way throughout the 1870s and onward. The greatness of Fanny's hymns comes from their ability to be understood and to touch the lives of ordinary people.

By the time she died in 1915, Fanny would pen at least 9,000 hymns. Although she mostly signed them with her given name,

she wrote a lot using pseudonyms. She is believed to have used almost 200.

It was also during these years of growing worldwide fame that Fanny became a much in demand public speaker at churches and charitable organizations. It is said that she was exceptionally gifted at this role.

### **The Last Years**

By the 1880s, Fanny was both living and working in the slums. Her work in the missions here gave her the opportunity to evangelize common people on a personal basis.

At the same time she kept busy with her writing life. During these last years, she would write two autobiographies: "Fanny Crosby's Life-Story, By Herself" in 1903 (out of print) and "Memories of Eighty Years" (retitled Fanny J. Crosby: An Autobiography) in 1906.

Fanny died at the age of 95 sometime during the night between February 11 and 12, 1915. On her tombstone are the words, "She hath done what she could" (from Mark 14:8). Of the thousands of hymns Fanny penned, most have been forgotten, but those used in churches around the globe throughout the decades have been priceless tools in touching lives for Jesus and continue to be so. Fanny Crosby was a true Wonder Woman for the cause of Christ—a Wonder Woman for the ages.

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## **When God Hates the Sinner**

**"Our job is not to love the sinner, hate their sin, but to love the sinner and hate our sin." (Rosaria Butterfield)**





A couple of times on here I have mentioned that I do not like to communicate in cliches, especially Christian ones. The social media fad of posting memes with eight words that neatly and simplistically sum up complex political and theological topics unnerves me.

So I'm not inclined to say things like "Love the sinner, hate the sin". I'm not alone on this. Some people really do not like this phrase. But what makes this Christian cliché so unique is that people in two diametrically opposite camps have condemned it.

On one hand, there are people who feel completely ostracized by Christians and their churches. They have spoken out vehemently against this platitude because, from what I can tell, the words ring hollow and self-righteously judgmental. To them, Christians have substituted loving and humble relationship for an empty, Sunday School answer theology. The message is shouted from a distance, focused on hatred and does not square with their reality. Hating their sin is, in essence, hating them. But I confess I am still quite ignorant in this area and I cannot fully represent other people's views.

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*out vehemently against this platitude because, from what I can tell, the words ring hollow and self-righteously judgmental.*

## **An Exegetical Fallacy**

Yet as interesting, I have read conservative Christian scholars speak out against this phrase as well. Most notably, D. A. Carson, a professor of Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School says:

*One evangelical cliché has it that God hates the sin but loves the sinner. There is a small element of truth in these words: God has nothing but hate for the sin, but this cannot be said with respect to how God sees the sinner. Nevertheless the cliché is false on the face of it, and should be abandoned. Fourteen times in the first fifty psalms alone, the psalmists state that God hates the sinner, that His wrath is on the liar, and so forth. In the Bible the wrath of God rests on both the sin (Rom. 1:18-23) and the sinner (1:24-32; 2:5; John 3:36). [1. Carson, D. A. "God's Love and God's Wrath." Bibliotheca Sacra 156 (October-December 1999): 387-398.]*

Let me make note that in Carson's explanation, the point is how *God* sees the sin and the sinner. The cliché is often used to how *Christians* are supposed to react to both. I am not quite as concerned with how accurate it is in either case as much as I care about understanding and listening to people and trying to communicate with genuineness and theology that is well-developed and nuanced. The Bible explained in context—and not pithy clichés—is the only thing I think should offend people. So its 'biblicalness' is not my focus here.

Instead I want to speak to Dr. Carson's point about God hating the sinner. I've read Psalm 5:5 and 11:5 many times over the years and I cannot get past the mention of God hating people and not merely sin. Same for Proverbs 6:19. And for Esau in Malachi and Romans. And so on.

So there must be some sense in which God hates sinners. At the same time, I don't think we can deny that God loves all sinners in that he wants relationship with them[2. 2 Peter 3:9] and gives them some measure of blessing[3. Matthew 5:45], among other nuanced definitions of love. We cannot state succinctly and unilaterally that "God hates sinners". Yet the verses in Psalms and Proverbs and about Esau have to mean something that keeps us just as honestly from saying "God doesn't hate sinners." Language is often too multi-dimensional and the Bible too often creates conflicting tensions in logic for us to try to capture this in meme or cliché form.

*God still pursues and God still blesses but unless a person comes with the humility of a child, God rejects. In that sense, he 'hates'.*

### **Hate As Volition, Not Feeling**

I think the resolution of the tension comes from understanding that 'hate' in both the OT and the NT means that God 'rejects in relationship'. Covenant relationship with God is a relational standing, like marriage[4. The parallels are so deep, the Hebrew word for 'hate' in Malachi has 'divorce' in its semantic range.]. God wants relationship with everyone, but he only welcomes those in who are humble enough to receive Him by grace instead of trying to earn it by works, intelligence or philosophy. God still pursues and God still blesses but unless a person comes with the humility of a child, God rejects. In that sense, he 'hates'.

Which brings me to my point. In Amos 6:8, God says, "*I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds...*" The book of Amos was written in part to express the idea that God hates pride from all peoples and will execute judgment impartially. Because pride prevents the relationship. Yet even his own people in covenant were still guilty of it. It is here that

God does love the sinner and hate the sin. But to be like God, we must hate ours as well.

### **I'm So Humbled By How Great I Am**

All the time on social media I see Christians brag on their accomplishments. From education to fitness to sports to serving the poor. I suppose there is something detached from reality about it on the internet that we feel comfortable doing it. I once noticed a comment from a professing Christ follower on my wife's Facebook that said she had lost X amount of weight and that she was "so proud of herself".

*How easily we hate the acts of terrorists who shed innocent blood yet sit in comfortable community with those who create disunity in churches. God absolutely hates both.*

If the same person had put on Facebook that she left a child in a hot car, the reaction would have been swift and harsh. Instead, people liked the status and praised her. Let me be clear: God hates pride as much as he does the worst things humans are capable of. God finds human pride as gross, disgusting and reprehensible as the worst human acts of evil imaginable, including abuse and murder. How easily we hate the acts of terrorists who shed innocent blood yet sit in comfortable community with those with proud eyes who create disunity in churches! God absolutely hates both[5. Proverbs 6:16-19].

I confess I have used social media to pridefully promote myself so I'm not casting stones here. But make no mistake, Amos 6 tells us clearly that Israel had puffed herself up due to her accomplishments and feelings of superiority over others. And God expressed passionately that he hated it. He still does. God clearly says, "*Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth*" and teaches, "*So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do,*

*to be honored by others. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret.”* Yet social media is often a breeding ground for violating these verses. Often in clever, proud-of-my-humility ways.

### **Why He Must Increase and We Decrease**

I do not think biblically it is wrong for a Christian to ever talk about what they have accomplished. But there must be a full and significant expression of praise to God along with it. This is not something to be done for show; God says in Amos 5:21 that he hates that too. He alone truly knows the difference. He knows if it comes from a heart that understands what John the Baptist meant when he said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from Heaven.” But before others, we must be satisfied with our good deeds being private, or else exalt God far more than the accomplishment. God will not share his glory with another. And he hates it when we try.

I’ll close with something written by Isaac Watts over 300 years ago that we desperately need to meditate on today:

*Now for the loss I bear his name  
What was my gain I count my loss  
My former pride I call my shame  
And nail my glory to His cross*

*The best obedience of my hands  
Dares not appear before Thy throne;  
But faith can answer Thy demands,  
By pleading what my Lord has done.*

*No more my God  
I boast no more*

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# Holiness, Hypocrisy, and Chicago Traffic

**“They just go round and round! And round and round!”**

I’ve lived in Chicago 15 years now. I had a car from 2002 to 2008 and then again after I got married in 2015. I don’t know what happened in the intervening years, but after I started driving regularly again two years ago, I sensed that I was far more impatient than I was the first few years I lived here. “Impatient” is really too nice a word. I am angry. Often.

People are everywhere. Things move slowly. One way streets mean backtracking. There is endless road construction. Driving here is sometimes like playing a video game: “You avoided that guy backing out without looking! +100!” “You didn’t see that cyclist and almost flattened him ! -200.” “You let 13 people and their four pets pass at a non-crosswalk! +150.” And there are days I feel like I’m in my own *Truman Show* where all these things keep moving around to block me from getting to where I want to go.

But don’t let these lighthearted comments fool you. I seriously deal with some deep-seated issues over this. I do not say this flippantly, but there are times when I am in traffic where I can sense the capacity to harm or even kill another human being within my soul. I do not think I ever will, I am just saying I feel a vindictive spirit rise up within me at times when someone cuts me off or when I am late

for something and Chicago is tearing up yet another major street and causing back ups for miles.

There is something about traffic that causes me to imagine what I would do if I were completely sovereign. If had all power, I would immediately give a flat tire to everyone who ran a stop sign. Every time I saw someone on their cell phone while driving, I would disintegrate the phone with my mind. Every time someone passed me with their music extremely loud and the windows rolled down, I would destroy their music system. And give them a flat tire.

### **The Heart of Worship**

In other words, I would have zero patience. And just as with Phill's article last week on [Learning To Love in Chuck E. Cheese's](#), I am amazed at how God can take the daily, trivial, and menial events in our lives and teach us about him. Because recently God has been using my thoughts to remind me that, unlike me, He is sovereign. He has complete authority and power to do whatever is good, even the immediate judgment of terrible drivers. Yet He is described over and over again in the Bible is patient and "slow to anger".

This, far more clearly and shamefully than anything else in my life right now, causes me to comprehend how unlike God I am. I am not sovereign or patient. Since God is both, it reminds me emphatically of why I am supposed to exalt him over myself. I believe this is the core meaning of the word "holy" in the Bible. God is different in a superior way. He is above us. Separate. Unique. When God says repeatedly in Isaiah "I am God, there is no other," this is what he means. And God will use just about anything to remind me of this. My time in Chicago traffic the last few months has been as edifying as any Bible study I've attended.

And of course the Bible teaches us that we are to be holy in

that we should be like God in some key ways, which is different and separate from the world. I already know I am a hypocrite when I drive because I get mad at people daily for doing the very things that I do. But I am equally as hypocritical because I bear and preach the name of my God, Jesus Christ, and yet I am so opposite him when I am behind the wheel.

In recent years there have been those that have asked the question: Has authenticity replaced holiness? I wonder if that question isn't about being so concerned with honesty about our sin that we do not talk about fighting it. I have always had an easy time being transparent but I confess I may to often stop there. On this I do not want to. I want to fight. I want to memorize and meditate on James 1:19-21. I want to be different than the world. Because God is.

My church small group often talks about how easily we get irate in traffic. I am amazed that even the most humble, gentle, passive people at my church will confess to how traffic gets to them like nothing else. So I write this in hopes that others feel my pain but also share my desire to change. Christians cannot be sovereign. But we can be patient. We can choose holiness over hypocrisy. Even in Chicago traffic.

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**[Learning to Love at Chuck E.](#)**



# Cheese's

I wrote the majority of this post eight years ago. I used to have a personal blog where I would review movies and albums, talk about sports, and rant about bad drivers. You know...the basics. Occasionally, I would delve into something a bit more "important." When I wrote this, I had recently been to a birthday party for a fully grown human man at Chuck E. Cheese's. Yes, you read that correctly. A grown up – an adult – chose to have their birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese's. Eight years later and I am still having problems fully processing that fact, which only reinforces in my mind the need to revisit this post. As you will see below, there is a streak of judgmental superiority running through me that needs confronting on a nearly daily basis.

I hate Chuck E. Cheese's. Hate is not a strong enough word. I loathe it in totality. It is a loud, unpleasant, wasteful, soul sucking place that is devoid of anything remotely approaching decent, let alone good. It attracts the loudest, most unpleasant, most wasteful, soulless people in the world. They come in throngs, like Uruk Hai on their way to Helm's Deep. (Nerdy Lord of the Rings reference for the uninitiated.) The patrons coalesce to form a massive, grotesque new organism that heats up the room and fouls the air with its presence. It is a destination I would not wish upon my worst enemy.

Yet I am worse. I am proud. I am arrogant. I am full of disdain. I do not love like I should. Jesus said to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, and if I believe that to be true then I am not measuring up. No. Scratch that. I am face first, firmly on the ground. I haven't even started the process of measuring up. I've known for some time that I am not a people person and I joke about it regularly. "I don't like people" has escaped my lips many times. It's all said in jest, of course, but deep down a part of me knows that it is true. Pathetically true. I am a Pharisee. I am convinced of my

own worth and abilities and I am blind to the valuable human life right next to me. To my eyes, that Chuck E. Cheese's patron doesn't look like much on the outside, but inside, God created that annoying person playing Skee Ball in His image. That person is eternally valuable to God. He loves them enough that He died for them. And I look at them like they are beneath me – a waste of my time and energy!

If I am going to learn how to truly love my neighbor, then more visits to Chuck E. Cheese's\* are in order. If I can love people there, I can love them anywhere.

\*Perhaps your Chuck E. Cheese's is CiCi's Pizza. Or Ryan's Steakhouse. Or McDonald's. Or Walmart. You get the point. It could be anywhere.