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'He died a hero': Calif. sergeant killed responding to active shooter

Sgt. Ron Helus was one of the first two officers to arrive at the scene

Duty Death: Ron Helus - [Ventura County, California]

End of Service: 11/08/2018

Nov 8, 2018

By Brittny Mejia, Sean Greene and Rong-Gong Lin li
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Right before Ventura County Sheriff's Sgt. Ron Helus rushed into the Borderline Bar & Grill on Wednesday night to respond to reports of a mass shooting, he called his wife.

"He said, 'hon, I got to go, I love you. I gotta go on a call,'" Sheriff Geoff Dean said.

Helus was one of the first two law enforcement officers to arrive shortly after 11:20 p.m. About four minutes after arriving on the scene and after hearing shots fired inside, he went through the front door and was hit multiple times, Dean said.

A California Highway Patrol officer who arrived with the sergeant stepped back to secure the perimeter until additional units arrived, then pulled Helus out of the line of fire, Dean said. Helus died later at Los Robles Regional Medical Center.

"They knew they had to take action and they went



Pictured is Sgt. Ron Helus. (Photo/ODMP)

dedicated sheriff's sergeant. He was totally committed. He gave his all. And tonight ... he died a hero. He went in to save lives, to save other people."

Helus, 54, a Moorpark resident, was a 29-year veteran of the department and was planning to retire in the next year or so.

"He was an unbelievable man," sheriff's Capt. Garo Kuredjian said. "He was a lifetime learner, a trainer, a mentor, a leader. He was a cop's cop. His void is going to be felt throughout our agency."

Kuredjian said a young man came up to him after the shooting to thank the deputies. "There's no doubt in my mind that your sergeant's actions saved others from being victims," the man told him. "That's a small piece of solace for the family knowing their father, their husband, ran into danger and saved lives."

in and did what they had to do," the sheriff said.

Roughly 15 minutes later, a second group of law enforcement personnel had gathered and entered the bar. By then, the shooting had stopped, and the suspect was found dead with a gunshot wound. Eleven people inside were found shot dead, and others wounded.

An emotional Dean described Helus as a friend and colleague.

"He knew the risks, but he knew, like we all do, why we serve," Dean said. "Ron was a hardworking,



An honor guard salutes the body of Sgt. Ron Helus before it departs the Los Robles Regional Medical Center Thursday, Nov. 8, 2018, in Thousand Oaks, Calif. Helus was killed after a gunman opened fire the night before inside a country dance bar crowded with hundreds of people. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

Dean said the sheriff's department trains its deputies to enter buildings where there's an active shooter, a policy that changed after the Columbine school shooting in 1999.

"Our officers know, when you get to a scene, and there's two of you, or even just one of you, and there's shooting going on, you go in," the sheriff said.

Sheriff's Sgt. Eric Buschow said he came on the job around the same time as Helus. "He was just a great guy. Just an instinctive cop," Buschow said. "He has always had a knack for investigations."



A law enforcement motorcade, providing an escort for a hearse carrying the body of Sgt. Ron Helus, makes its way northbound on Highway 101 Thursday, Nov. 8, 2018, in Newbury Park, Calif. Helus was fatally shot while responding to a mass shooting at a country music bar in Southern California. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

Helus worked narcotics, was on the SWAT team for many years, and was an instructor.

“He’s a tactician so I have no doubt he employed the best tactics possible,” he said. “Unfortunately in a chaotic situation like that, you’ve just got to go in. And he did.”



Law enforcement and fire personnel salute from an overpass as a motorcade with the body of Sgt. Ron Helus passes by Thursday, Nov. 8, 2018, in Newbury Park, Calif. Helus was fatally shot while responding to a mass shooting at a country music bar in Southern California. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

“To describe it as heroic,” he trailed off for about a minute, as he stood about 300 feet from the bar. “What else do you call it?”

“It’s just not right,” he said about the shooting.

In addition to his wife, Helus is survived by his son.



Kyle Jorrey
@KyleBJorrey

Photo of Sgt. Ron Helus from his Facebook page. While others

ran, he went inside to take on the shooter. Now he's gone.
Heartbreaking [#hero](#) [#duty](#) [#Borderline](#) [#RIP](#)



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Commissioner O'Neill
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The thoughts of every [#NYPD](#) member this morning are with the families & colleagues of all those killed or injured in the shooting inside a Thousand Oaks, Calif., bar — 12 innocent lives taken, including the first Ventura County cop on the scene: Sgt. Ron Helus, a 29-year veteran.

Obituary for Officer Allen Lee Jacobs

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/greenvilleonline/obituary.aspx?n=allan-lee-jacobs&pid=178118565&fhid=5447>

Officer Allen Lee Jacobs, 28, lost his life while in the line of duty serving the citizens of Greenville on Friday, March 18, 2016.

Born in Denver, CO, he was the son of Don and Tammie Jacobs, faculty members at Bob Jones University.

Allen grew up in Travelers Rest, SC. He attended Bob Jones Academy, earned a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Troy University, and was nearing completion of an MBA. He was a Sergeant in the 82nd Airborne Division of the U.S. Army at Fort Bragg, NC, a Jump Master, and a decorated Iraq War veteran. He joined the City of Greenville Police Department in 2011, where he was on the SWAT and Community Response teams. He was also involved in many Community Coordination and Education programs, such as Cops on the Court and the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) summer program. He served the schools within the City of Greenville by instructing and mentoring young people, as well as serving as a zone patrol officer in his off-duty hours. He received a Purple Heart Award in 2015 for his heroic service.

Allen was a member of Christ Fellowship in Travelers Rest.

In addition to his parents, he is survived by his wife, Meghan Murphy Jacobs; his sons, Michael (age 6), and Dillon (age 5), and a third child to be born in July; his sister, Catherine Jacobs of Greenville; maternal grandmother, Peggy Thorsell of Pittsburg, TX; paternal grandparents, Don and Elaine Jacobs of Lincoln Park, MI; and aunts, uncles and cousins. He was preceded in death by his brother, Donald Paul Jacobs in 2012.

Funeral services will be Thursday, March 24, at 11:00 am at Timmons Arena at Furman University with Pastor Thomas Young and Chaplain Monty Carter officiating. Burial will follow at Coleman Memorial Park in Travelers Rest. Standing in honor of the family, the City of Greenville Police Department welcomes those in the community wanting to pay their respect at the visitation on Wednesday from 3:00 to 6:00pm at Daniel Memorial Chapel at Furman University.

In lieu of flowers memorials may be made to a fund for his children's education at TD Bank, any branch in the City of Greenville.

In memory of
Officer Allen Jacobs

March 18th, 2016
28 Years Old
4 ½ Years of Service









‘I don’t want you to get shot,’ girl, 4, begged mother after Philando Castile shooting

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/06/22/i-dont-want-you-to-get-shooted-girl-4-begged-mother-after-philando-castile-shooting/>

June 22, 2017

In the back seat of a patrol car, moments after witnessing a Minnesota police officer fire seven shots at Philando Castile, Diamond Reynolds’s 4-year-old daughter begged her mother to stop screaming, in fear that officers would shoot her, too.

“Mom, please stop saying cuss words and screaming because I don’t want you to get shot,” the girl pleaded to Reynolds, Castile’s girlfriend.

Reynolds, whom police had placed in the back seat next to her daughter, gave the girl a kiss.

“I could keep you safe,” her daughter said.

“It’s okay,” Reynolds responded. “I got it, okay?”

The dialogue — captured in [video footage](#) from a police officer’s squad car — was part of a trove of files released by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension on Wednesday, five days after police officer Jeronimo Yanez, 29, was acquitted of manslaughter in Castile’s July 2016 death during a traffic stop.

On Tuesday, state officials also released to the public a police dashboard camera recording of the shooting itself, along with a collection of other documents and evidence from the state’s investigation into the shooting, The Washington Post [reported](#).

The scene between Reynolds and her daughter provides an even deeper look into the initial aftermath of the shooting in Falcon Heights, Minn., which was live-streamed worldwide on Facebook by Reynolds, who was sitting next to Castile in the car when the officer fired. Her 4-year-old daughter was sitting in the back seat.

The officer testified that he feared for his life after Castile told him that he had a gun. Reynolds told authorities Castile was shot while reaching for his wallet, not his gun, which he had a permit to carry. Castile, 32, worked as a nutrition services supervisor for St. Paul Public Schools.

Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton (D), who met with black leaders Wednesday, spoke of the video footage during a news conference, the [Star Tribune](#) reported.

“Seeing the little girl and her mother in the back of the squad car, hearing a child’s narrative of what occurred, it was really awful,” Dayton said.

Police video footage from July 6, 2016, shows St. Anthony, Minn., police officer Jeronimo Yanez firing at Philando Castile during a traffic stop in Falcon Heights, Minn. (St. Anthony Police Department/AP)

In the video of the back seat, Reynolds’s daughter is shown trying to console her mother, whom police had handcuffed and did not yet know whether Castile was alive or dead.

“It’s okay, Mommy,” the girl said.

“I can’t believe they just did this,” Reynolds responded. As the mother screamed and cried, her daughter held her close.

“It’s okay, I’m right here with you,” the girl said.

Minutes later, Reynolds moved around in her seat as her daughter asked her to stay quiet so she wouldn’t be shot.

“They’re not going to shoot me, okay?” Reynolds said. “I’m already in handcuffs.”

“Don’t take them off,” the girl begged. “I wish this town was safer.”

“That’s true,” Reynolds said.

“I don’t want it to be like this anymore,” the girl said.

“Tell that to the police, okay?” Reynolds said. “When they come and get me, tell them you wish that they didn’t have to kill people.”

In another angle of the video footage, officers instructed the mother and daughter to put on their seat belts in the back seat. A voice told Reynolds she was being taken to give a statement to the state Bureau of Criminal Apprehension.

“You guys don’t understand,” Reynolds said, crying. “I feel like I’m being a prisoner and you guys did this to me.”

“Why?” Reynolds screamed out, looking distraught.

The girl tells her, “I was scared because I didn’t want bullets to come in the back seat.” (Photographs later showed a bullet that passed through Castile’s seat hit the back seat, barely missing the girl.)

“Please, God let him be okay,” Reynolds shouted. “Please, God.”

“His birthday is next week,” she said. “I can’t believe this.”

Where Is God? The Supremacy of Christ in an Age of Terror

John Piper, September 11, 2005 - <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/where-is-god>

This weekend is the first anniversary of 9/11 that has occurred on the Lord's day, Sunday. Therefore, it seemed good to us to step back and pose the question again about the meaning of the supremacy of Christ in an age of terror.

Supreme over Life and Death

One of the truths of the Bible that we embrace with trembling joy is the truth of God's supremacy in all things. The mission of our church is that *we exist to spread a passion of the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ*. When we say that, we do not mean: "except in calamities," "except in war," "except when Al Qaeda blows up a building or a train," "except when cancer takes a mom or a child is born with profound disabilities." There are no "except" clauses in our mission statement.

We did not formulate our mission in a rosy world — and then get surprised and embarrassed by the reality of suffering. We did not have our head in the sand. We formulated our mission in the real world of pain and suffering and evil and death. We have seen even among our own people, some very peaceful, but also some very terrible deaths. *We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things — all things — for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ — all the time*. A passion for God's supremacy — Christ's supremacy (for he is God incarnate) — in *all things, all the time*.

Sorrowful, Yet Always Rejoicing

None of us who has lived a few decades — for me that means almost six — has embraced this mission without trembling. And none of us has lived this mission for long without tears. We have said it dozens of times here at Bethlehem, and we will say it till we die, that the joy we pursue and the joy we embrace in Jesus Christ is always — always in this world — interwoven with sorrow. There is no unadulterated joy in this world for people who care about others. The Bible describes Christ's servants like this: "[We are] sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" ([2 Corinthians 6:10](#)).

"Sorrowful yet always rejoicing' means that suffering remains only for a while in this world."

"Sorrowful yet always rejoicing," how can that be? It can be because Christ is supreme over all things forever, but suffering and death remain for a while. Life is not simple. There is pleasure, and there is pain. There is sweetness, and there is bitter suffering. There is joy, and there is misery. There is life and health, and there is disease and death. And therefore, emotions are not simple. For those who love others, and not just their own comforts, this complexity means that we will rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep ([Romans 12:15](#)). And there is always someone we know who is weeping, and someone we know who is rejoicing. And therefore, we will learn the secret of "sorrowful yet always rejoicing" — and joyful yet always sorrowing. Those amazing words that describe the Christian soul — "sorrowful yet always rejoicing" — mean that suffering remains for awhile in this world, but Christ is supreme now and forever.

The Painful Reality of Evil

The first plane that hit the World Trade Towers, Flight 11, immediately killed 92 people on board that flight. Flight 175 that hit the second tower a few minutes later killed 65 people on board. In the towers themselves it appears now that 2,595 people perished when the towers fell, including those who worked there or visited there, and those who were entering to save them.

Flight 77 carried 64 people when it hit the Pentagon within an hour after the first attack. Inside the Pentagon 125 people died in addition to these 64. Flight 93 with 45 people aboard turned around over Pennsylvania and was headed . . . where? The White House? The Congress? Todd Beamer and others wrestled control from the hijackers, it seems, and the plane crashed with no survivors near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. All 45 people died. The total fatalities in these terrorist events was about 2,986.

We thought that would be the calamity for this message to focus on. But God had other plans. Who can pose the question of God's sovereignty and Christ's supremacy today and leave Hurricane Katrina out of account? What happened in New Orleans and surrounding areas is different than almost anything this country has ever seen. The September 8, 1900 Galveston Hurricane may have killed more — up to 12,000, we don't know — but it did not displace hundreds of thousands and leave a major city virtually empty and paralyzed with several surrounding, smaller towns even more devastated. Who can speak of the supremacy of Christ in an age of terror without considering the terror of 140-mile-an-hour winds and broken levees and floodwaters covering eighty percent of a great city and who knows how many people dead in their attics?

And lest we think naively in response to these calamities, as though the cost of lives was something unusual, let's remind ourselves of the obvious and the almost overwhelming fact that over 50,000,000 people die every year in this world — over six thousand every hour, over one hundred every minute. And most of them do not die in ripe old age by sleeping peacefully away into eternity. Most die young. Most die after long struggles with pain. And millions die because of the evil of man against man.

“If there is to be any Christian joy in this world, it will be sorrowful joy, brokenhearted joy.”

Sudden calamities shock us only to make more plain what is happening every hour of every day of your entire life. Thousands perish in pain and misery every day. Probably seven or eight thousand people will have died during this worship service. Some of them are screaming out in pain just now as I am speaking and as you sit there in relative comfort. If there is to be any Christian joy in this world, along with love, it will be sorrowful joy, brokenhearted joy. What person in this room, who has lived long enough, does not know that the sweetest joys, the deepest joys, are marked with tears, not laughter?

Our Need for God

So even in our own experience — in our own souls — believers or unbelievers, there is a kind of witness that the world of evil and pain and misery and death is not a meaningless place. It is not a place without a good and purposeful God. Some people — not all — have found in the greatest evil — the time of greatest sorrow — the greatest need for God and the greatest evidence of God.

It happens like this: A great evil happens — say the holocaust with 6,000,000 murders. Or the Stalinist Soviet gulag with many more than that sent to their deaths. In the midst of these horrors, the human soul, that had been blithely pursuing its worldly pleasures with scarcely a thought about God and with no serious belief in any absolutes like evil and good, or right and wrong — happily living in the dream-world of relativism — suddenly is confronted with an evil so horrible and so great as to make the soul scream out with ultimate moral indignation: No! This is wrong! This is evil!

And for the first time in their life they hear themselves speaking with absolute conviction. They have a conviction of absolute reality. They know now beyond the shadow of a doubt that such a thing as evil exists. They admit that all their life up till then was a game. And now they are confronted with the stark question: If there is such a thing as absolute evil — if there is a moral reality that is above and different from the mere physical processes of evolutionary energy plus time plus matter — then where does it come from, and what is it based on?

And many people discover in this moment of greatest evil that there is only one satisfactory answer: there is a God above the universe who sets the standards of good and evil and writes them on the human heart. They are not purposeless chemical reactions in our brains. They have reality outside of us, above us, in God. Paradoxically, therefore, the times of greatest human evil have often proved for many to be times when God is most needed and most self-evidently real. Without him evil and good are simply different electro-chemical impulses in the brain of mammal primates called homo sapiens. We know — you know — that is not true.

Why Does Such a World Exist?

So we ask: *Why, Lord? Why is the world you made like this? If you are God — if you are the Christ, the Son of the living God — why is this world so full of terror and trouble?*

Here is what I believe the Bible teaches in answer to this question. I will give two answers that are not the reason such a world exists, and then four answers that are the reasons such world exists. I deal with each very briefly and point you to the Scriptures where you can search God's word for yourself.

1. The reason this terrorized and troubled world exists is not because God is not in total control.

The Bible is overwhelmingly clear that God governs everything in the universe from the smallest bird to the largest storm. “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father” ([Matthew 10:29](#)). “Even winds and sea obey him” ([Matthew 8:27](#)). “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord” ([Proverbs 16:33](#)). “The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will” ([Proverbs 21:1](#)). “Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?” ([Lamentations 3:37](#)). “Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?” ([Amos 3:6](#)). “He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him” ([Mark 1:27](#)). “I am God, and there is none like me . . . saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” ([Isaiah 46:9-10](#)).

There is no person or being in the universe that can thwart the sovereign will of God. Satan is his most powerful enemy and does much evil in the world, but he must first get God's permission, and none of his actions is outside God's governance. He never breaks free from his leash ([Luke 22:31](#); [Job 2:6-7](#); [42:11](#)).

2. The reason this terrorized and troubled world exists is not because God is evil or unjust.

“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” ([1 John 1:5](#)). “Good and upright is the Lord” ([Psalm 25:8](#)). The angels cry before God day and night, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” ([Isaiah 6:3](#)). And when he does things that seem evil to us, the Bible teaches us to speak to man like this: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” ([Genesis 50:20](#)). God is not evil, even when he wills that evil come to pass. There are good and holy and just purposes in all he does. For those who love him he “works all things together for good” ([Romans 8:28](#)). Now and forever.

3. The reason this terrorized and troubled world exists is because God planned the history of redemption and then permitted sin to enter the world through our first parents, Adam and Eve.

In [2 Timothy 1:9](#) the apostle Paul said, “[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.” In other words, before there was any world or any sin in the world, God planned saving grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That means that God knew Adam would sin. He was already planning how he would save us.

“Knowing God most fully is what it means for us to be most fully loved.”

Therefore, Adam’s sin was part of God’s plan so that God could reveal his mercy and grace and justice and wrath and patience and wisdom in ways that could have never been revealed if there were no sin and no Savior and no history of salvation. God’s aim for this fallen world is that he be known more fully, because knowing God most fully is what it means for us to be most fully loved. If you turn to Christ, you will discover in God more wonders in this fallen world than could be imagined in any other world.

4. The reason this terrorized and troubled world exists is because God subjected the natural world to futility.

That is, God put the natural world under a curse so that the physical horrors we see around us in diseases and calamities would become a vivid picture of how horrible sin is. In other words, natural evil is a signpost pointing to the horrors of moral evil. Before I say another word, hear this word of clarification: some of the sweetest, most humble, godly, Christ-exalting, heaven-bound people carry some of those signs. Listen to [Romans 8:18–21](#):

The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

In other words, God subjected the creation to futility and bondage to decay and misery and death. He disordered the natural world because of the disorder of the moral and spiritual world — that is, because of sin. In our present condition blinded by sin and dishonoring God every day, we cannot see how repugnant sin is. Hardly anyone in the world feels the horror that our sin is. Physical pain we feel! And so it becomes God’s trumpet blast to tell us that something is dreadfully wrong in the world. Diseases and deformities are God’s portraits of what sin is like in the spiritual realm. That is true even though some of the most godly people bear those deformities. Calamities are God’s previews of what sin deserves and will one day receive in judgment a thousand times worse. They are warnings. And that is true even when they sweep away Christ-followers and Christ-rejectors.

Oh that we could all see and feel how repugnant, how offensive, how abominable it is to blackball our Maker, to ignore him and distrust him and demean him and give him less attention in our hearts than we do the carpet on our living room floor. We must see this, or we will not turn to Christ for salvation from sin. Therefore, God mercifully shouts to us in our sicknesses and pain and calamities: Wake up! Sin is like this! Sin leads to things like this. (See [Revelation 9:20](#); [16:9](#), [11](#).) The natural world is shot through with horrors to wake us from the dreamworld of thinking sin is no big deal. It is a horrifically big deal.

5. The reason this terrorized and troubled world exists is so that followers of Christ can experience and display that no pleasure and no treasure compares to knowing Christ.

That is, the loss of every good thing in this world is meant to reveal that Christ himself more than compensates for all losses. We see it in the New Testament and the Old Testament. The apostle Paul says, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” ([Philippians 3:8](#)). The superior worth of Christ is magnified because in all Paul’s losses, he experiences Christ as all-satisfying.

The prophet Habakkuk said it with amazing and painful beauty:

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ([Habakkuk 3:17–18](#))

Famines, pestilence, persecution — these happen so that the world might see in the followers of Jesus and discover for themselves that God made us for himself and that he is our “exceeding joy” ([Psalm 43:4](#)) and at his right hand are “pleasures forever more” ([Psalm 16:11](#)). The losses of life are meant to wean us off the poisonous pleasures of the world and lure us to Christ our everlasting joy.

6. Finally, the reason this terrorized and troubled world exists is to make a place for Jesus Christ the Son of God to suffer and die for our sins.

The reason there is terror is so that Christ would be terrorized. The reason there is trouble is so that Christ could be troubled. The reason there is pain is so that Christ could feel pain. This is the world God prepared for the suffering and death of his Son. This is the world where God made the best display of his love in the suffering of his Son.

[Romans 5:8](#): “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” All his suffering was the plan of God to reveal redeeming love to us. The sovereignty of God, the evil of the world, and the love of God meet at the cross of Christ.

“God’s deepest answer to terrorism and calamity is the suffering and death of his Son.”

Listen to this amazing statement from [Acts 4:27–28](#) about God’s plan for the suffering of his Son — for you! “Truly in this city [Jerusalem] there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.” All the scheming, all the flogging, all the spitting, all the beating with rods, all the mockery, all the abandonment by his friends, all the thorns in his head, all the nails in his hands and feet, the sword in his side, the weight of the sins of the world — all of it according to God’s plan. For you to see God’s love more graphically.

God’s deepest answer to terrorism and calamity is the suffering and death of his Son. He entered into our fallen world of sin and misery and death. He bore in himself the cause of it all — sin. And he bought by his death the cure for it all — forgiveness and everlasting joy in the age to come.

On his behalf I invite — I urge — you to receive him as your Savior and Lord and the supreme Treasure of your life.

How Can God Be Sovereign and Good and Allow Suffering?

How can God be good and sovereign over all things and also allow intense personal suffering into our lives? This is such an important and central question for us at Desiring God. And it's a question that arrived in the inbox from a young man.

“Hello, Pastor John! My girlfriend is becoming a respiratory therapist, and since beginning her training, she has interacted with many patients who are brain-dead or have no control over their bodies. She has serious questions about where God is in all of this personal suffering. How can God, if he is sovereign, be good by allowing certain people to suffer in this way? What purposes do they serve in this state? I have spoken to her about these things, trying to answer her questions (and I will continue to do so). I want her to see the Lord's character. But I also wanted to ask you for guidance in answering these questions. What Scripture should I walk her through? What's the best approach to this?”

Micro and Macro Reasons

I have found it helpful to distinguish between what I call *micro reasons* for why people suffer and *macro reasons* for why there's suffering in the world. When it comes to micro reasons, we usually don't have answers. Why this particular suffering? Why on this particular person? Why at this particular time? Why this particular intensity? Why with these peculiar complications? Why in all these particular relationships? Why this particular duration? When we're talking about those micro reasons, we usually don't know exactly why.

“Our suffering may be intended by God to draw out of others something they wouldn't otherwise have experienced.”

The Bible doesn't address the particular situation of each person. That's where a lot of people stop and say, “Oh, we don't know why. Suffering is a total mystery,” instead of saying, “No. No. I need to keep reading my Bible.”

When it comes to macro reasons for why there is suffering in the world, the Bible is rich with helpfulness. It's explicitly intended to be helpful for us at the macro level.

And I don't have time to go into them all here. If people want see what I mean and what those reasons are, go to Desiring God and just type in the search engine, “[Five Purposes for Suffering](#).” You'll get a short summary of what I mean by the macro reasons.

Suffering for Others

So what I thought I would do here is just give one perspective that our friend and his girlfriend may not have thought about much. It may perhaps be a fresh insight into dealing with either brain-dead people or people who are totally unable to help themselves.

We usually look for the purposes of suffering in the effect it has on the sufferer. For example, Paul says, “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’” ([2 Corinthians 12:8–9](#)).

Paul concludes, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)). Paul the sufferer turns his pain into a Christ-exalting experience by showing

Christ's all-sufficiency in his weakness.

That's the way I usually think about trying to come to terms with why I or somebody else might be suffering. But what we don't usually look for is God's purpose for our weaknesses in the lives of others. In other words, could our weaknesses or our suffering be intended by God to draw out of others something they wouldn't otherwise have experienced concerning Christ?

We don't often take into consideration that here's a whole spectrum of weaknesses, ranging from minor personality annoyances, which might call for patience from a husband or a wife or friends, all the way to being brain-dead or being utterly dependent on the goodwill of others.

Weakness Draws Out Grace

Let's think about this for a moment. This is very, very helpful for me to do this. I saw things in pondering this question that I had never seen before.

“Their suffering is not about their sanctification. It's about your sanctification.”

In [1 Thessalonians 5:14](#), Paul says, “We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all” ([1 Thessalonians 5:14](#)). Now think of it: God, in his sovereignty, could cause idle saints to be industrious. He could cause fainthearted saints to be lionhearted. He could cause weak saints to be strong.

But instead, he tells the leaders of the church that these people are an occasion for their patience, at least in the short run. He doesn't act as if they're going away. Some people are just going to be that. Their weaknesses draw out, in others, evidences of God's grace.

They're Here for You

Now, consider the fact that being utterly unable to feed oneself, or care for oneself, or even communicate is at the far end of the spectrum of disabilities that the church is called upon to serve. Many churches are awakening not only to the *responsibility* of serving those with disabilities, but to the *privilege* of serving them.

A key text that may be helpful with regard to those who are all the way at the end of the spectrum of disability — namely, the brain-dead — is in [1 Corinthians 12:21–26](#):

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ([1 Corinthians 12:21–26](#))

Now, this is amazing when you think about it. Paul doesn't say that the weakness and the dishonorable-ness of these people is to teach them anything — like the way his own thorn in the flesh was meant to teach him something (to keep him from being conceited).

He says, “These weak, seemingly dishonorable people, whom the world would probably despise or just throw away, are here for you. They’re here for you. You are strong. They are here for you to show honor to, for you to serve, for you to care for and show grace toward.” This is service that can never be paid back in this world. Their suffering is not about their sanctification. It’s about *your* sanctification.

Jesus said, “When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” ([Luke 14:13–14](#)).

What will you get paid by a brain-dead person? Nothing. But you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

Not Many Were Powerful

Here’s a remarkable thought about those who seem unable to make any contribution at all. I had never thought about this before. I offer it for your consideration. This is [1 Corinthians 1:26](#): “Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world” — and then we get this phrase — “even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are” ([1 Corinthians 1:26–28](#)).

“God’s ways are not our ways. He has purposes for our weaknesses, even those massive disabilities that leave us unable to do anything.”

I’m offering this for you to seriously ponder. Do you think even “things that are not” — which God chose to shame the things that are, to make the strong realize they have a need — do you think people so low, so despised that they may as well not even be present, might have a relevance to the brain-dead?

God’s Ways

One last text about the weak for us to reflect on — [Acts 20:35](#): “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak . . .” In other words, our work needs to supply what they can’t supply. That’s the point. He goes on: “. . . and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

In other words, the existence of the weak, for whom we are to work in ways that they can’t, is described by Paul as an occasion for us to be more blessed because “it’s more blessed to give” — it is more blessed to work for the weak than to merely work for ourselves.

God’s ways are not our ways. He has purposes with our weaknesses, even those massive disabilities that leave us unable to do anything for ourselves. This is not about sanctifying the helpless in this world. It’s about sanctifying the strong. That’s the whole point of those texts. Indeed, Paul goes so far as to say it’s about their joy, not just their patience, because it is more blessed to give than to receive, even as we lay down our lives for the weakest of the weak.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-can-god-be-sovereign-and-good-and-allow-suffering>

God Is Always Doing 10,000 Things in Your Life

“God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them.” Not only may you see a tiny fraction of what God is doing in your life; the part you do see may make no sense to you.

- You may find yourself in prison, and God may be advancing the gospel among the guards, and making the free brothers bold. ([Philippians 1:12–14](#))
- You may find yourself with a painful thorn, and God may be making the power of Christ more beautiful in weakness. ([2 Corinthians 12:7–9](#))
- You may find yourself with a dead brother that Jesus could have healed, and God may be preparing to show his glory. ([John 11:1–44](#))
- You may find yourself sold into slavery, accused falsely of sexual abuse, and forgotten in a prison cell, and God may be preparing you to rule a nation. (Genesis 37–50)
- You may wonder why a loved one is left in unbelief so long, and find that God is preparing a picture of his patience and a powerful missionary. ([Galatians 1:15](#); [1 Timothy 1:12–16](#))
- You may live in all purity and humility and truth only to end rejected and killed, and God may be making a parable of his Son and an extension of his merciful sufferings in yours. ([Isaiah 53:3](#); [Mark 8:31](#); [Colossians 1:24](#))
- You may walk through famine, be driven from your homeland, lose husband and sons, and be left desolate with one foreign daughter-in-law, and God may be making you an ancestor of a King. (Ruth 1–4)
- You may find the best counselor you’ve ever known giving foolish advice, and God may be preparing the destruction of your enemy. ([2 Samuel 17:14](#))
- You may be a sexually pure single person and yet accused of immorality, and God may be preparing you as a virgin blessing in ways no one can dream. ([Luke 1:35](#))
- You may not be able to sleep and look in a random book, and God may be preparing to shame your arrogant enemy and rescue a condemned people. ([Esther 6:1–13](#))
- You may be shamed and hurt, and God may be confirming your standing as his child and purifying you for the highest inheritance. ([Hebrews 12:5–11](#))

There are three granite foundation stones under this confidence: God’s love. God’s sovereignty. God’s wisdom.

Love: In the death of Christ on our behalf, God has totally removed his wrath from us ([Romans 8:3](#); [Galatians 3:13](#)). Now there is not only no condemnation ([Romans 8:1](#)), but now God is *only* merciful ([Romans 8:32](#)). Even his discipline is all mercy.

Sovereignty: There is no power in the universe that can stop him from fulfilling his totally good plans for you. “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” ([Job 42:2](#)).

Wisdom: God’s infinite wisdom always sees a way to bring the greatest good out of the most painful and complex situations. “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” ([Romans 11:33](#)).

Therefore, no matter what you face this year, God will be doing 10,000 things in your life that you cannot see. Trust him. Love him. And they will all be good for you.

Why We Added a Prayer of Lament to Our Sunday Gathering

<https://www.9marks.org/article/why-we-added-a-prayer-of-lament-to-our-sunday-gathering/>

The world is not as it should be—and we feel it. From natural disasters to school shootings to personal tragedies, we've all been affected by the brokenness of a fallen world. We yearn for Jesus' return to right all wrongs and renew our world, freeing us from the chaos and grief that accompanies deep suffering.

But until that day, what do we do with our grief? What do we do right now while we're in the thick of it? We lament.

WHAT IS LAMENT?

Lament is a biblical way to process grief. It gives us the opportunity to face and name our pain and then to create space for future hope—all without glossing over tragedy. It allows us to cry and rage and even protest life's difficulties to God and others without fear of judgment. It gives us permission to ask *How God? Why God?* It's often raw and emotional. And that's okay. The Bible gives space for God's people to do this.

LAMENT IN THE BIBLE

In the Old Testament, almost a third of Israel's songbook is devoted to psalms of lament, both corporate and individual. Israel's wisdom literature offers the story of Job's honest protests to the Lord amid his tragedy. Lamentations is a tear-drenched book entirely dedicated to the cries of God's people as they process the greatest catastrophe in their history and ask for deliverance despite their sin.

In the New Testament, we witness Jesus lamenting Jerusalem's future doom and then his own path of doom in the garden. We see missionaries like Paul crying over his lost brothers of Israel. Even in Revelation, the martyred saints cry out "How long, oh Lord?" as they await their vindication. Lament is ingrained into the culture of Jesus' people and will be until he returns.

LAMENT IN CORPORATE GATHERINGS

That's why we recently added a corporate prayer of lament to our public worship. It's not a weekly dirge, but an honest, biblical cry we pray every few months to express our grief over the suffering in this world and in our lives. It's been invaluable. Here are four reasons why.

1. Corporate lament creates space for grief.

It's hard for the suffering soul to attend overly triumphant church services week in and week out. It's not that he or she doesn't believe in the triumphant work of Jesus, it's just that those services don't always give space for the emotions that the suffering saint is experiencing—grief, confusion, anger, hurt, shame, and fear. Rather than rushing to a resolution, a prayer of lament allows us to slow down and journey through the honest pain. It also gives us an opportunity to bring our grief to God knowing that the God who receives our praise can also handle our protests.

For example, this space gives voice to our mothers who miscarry and our members who have been abused. It tells those who struggle against mental illness, those whose new normal is anything but normal, that our church is a place for them. It protests wider tragedies like school shootings, mass refugee displacements, and destructive natural disasters. Through lament, sufferers are given a voice. They're both seen and heard.

2. Corporate lament teaches us empathy.

It's not just corporate worship that too often rushes past suffering; it's the congregation as well. We aren't sure what to do when someone voices anger at God or expresses profound sadness. It's uncomfortable. If we haven't gone through it we may not understand or even be okay with it. So we might tell the sufferer it's going to be okay, repeat a pithy saying we have heard, or quote a verse, and then offer to pray without ever listening. In the moment, this might pass as helpful, but over time, it can come off as trite and even careless.

Lament teaches us how to mourn with those who mourn. It teaches us to listen and understand the depths of grief so that we can better bear one another's burdens. It grows our compassion and patience. Lament also teaches us how to pray alongside the grieving. We can sit alongside them and say, "We see you." This is powerful for the isolated griever.

3. Corporate lament engages our emotions.

Lament lets us voice how we feel despite what we know. And that's okay. The poetry of Lamentations isn't merely a historical retelling of Jerusalem's fall and Judah's demise. It portrays unfiltered, raw emotion that affected God's people at every level—psychological, physical, spiritual, and relational.

If the church isn't teaching us what to do with these emotions, then the world most certainly will. Thankfully, corporate lament teaches us to take the full range of our emotions *to God*. We don't have to pull ourselves together before we come to him. Rather than letting our emotions drive us where they want, we're using them to drive us to the Lord. God can handle our deepest emotions. After all, he "has broad enough shoulders to cry on and a big enough chest to beat against" (Christopher Wright, *The Message of Lamentations*, 78).

4. Corporate lament places our trust in God.

A lament is ultimately a prayer of faith. It acknowledges that God is in control and so we cry *to him* rather than run from him. As God's people, we know he has heard our cries because he sent his Son to die in our place. He has already removed the stain of sin from our hearts and given us spiritual life. And one day, he will remove the consequences of sin from this world and heal our broken bodies. Faith does not minimize our grief, but helps us place our trust in him even as we suffer in the here and now.

Corporate lament teaches us to trust God amid pain, whether it's caused by our own sin, the sin of others, or the sinfulness of this world. We know one day he will remove all pain and evil and bring justice and renewal to his world. He will wipe away every tear and heal every wound. And so we take our pain to him now even as we trust that he will take it all away then.

The end of every prayer of lament is the same: "Come, Lord Jesus, come."

What Does a Prayer of Lament Sound Like?

<https://www.9marks.org/article/what-does-a-prayer-of-lament-sound-like/>

Editor's note: Last week, we posted an article entitled "[Why We Added a Prayer of Lament to Our Sunday Gathering](#)." Below are two samples of such prayers from Hinson Baptist Church in Portland, Oregon.

* * * * *

SCRIPTURE READING

From Mark 14:

³² And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. ³⁴ And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." ³⁵ And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

TRANSITION

Jesus, the perfect Son of God, wrestled deeply and emotionally with the path set before him. He poured out his soul to the Father, asking if there is any other way, while still expressing total submission to his Father. Like Jesus, let's go together to our Father and voice our grief and sorrow over the difficult things in our lives. Please pray with me.

PRAYER

Father, this morning we come to you deeply distressed and troubled. Like Jesus, our souls are overwhelmed with sorrow by the difficult circumstances that have come upon us. Circumstances that seem to have no end in sight. Lord, we think of those in our faith family who are dealing with the loss of loved ones—spouses, children, unborn babies, friends, relatives. Losses that will remain with them until they too go home to be with you. Oh God, we grieve these losses. We confess that we don't understand. Questions fill our minds: Why did this have to happen? How could you allow it? Where are you in the midst of it?

We're also filled with sorrow over the relational difficulties that have come into our lives. We think of the challenges of marriage or parenting. The difficulties that have overtaken marriages because of porn addiction, broken trust, rampant insecurities, outbursts of anger. The pain of a wayward children who reject you, despite everything they were raised to believe. The strains of taking care of aging parents as we watch life drain from their bodies. Oh God, these daily difficulties wear on us until we feel too exhausted to go on.

God, we're also exhausted by the physical, mental and emotional trials you have brought upon many of us. We think of those who are battling physical and mental illness, disease, and disability. Lord, it's such a demoralizing and dehumanizing path. The constant nausea, dizziness, fatigue, fog, tremors, the pain that shoots through our bodies, the insomnia, the loss of basic physical functions, the inability to do simple things like walk or run or play with our kids...or even have kids. We grieve the anxiety that ravages our lives, the darkness of depression that bleeds into every part of our soul, the highs and lows that destroy our relationships, all of it,

makes us feel less than human. We HATE it. We hate it God. And we confess that we often struggle to see you in the midst of these trials.

But, of course, Lord, when it's all said and done, we acknowledge that many of our trials have been brought on us through our own sin. We've gone after the false gods of sex or money or comfort or control or escapism and now we're tasting the bitter consequences of those choices. Like Israel, we spurned you to go after other lovers and now those very lovers have spurned us in our greatest moment of need. Oh God, our sin makes us miserable. We hate it and yet often we keep going back to it. We feel trapped.

All of these things fill our hearts with sorrow and grief. And yet we do not grieve as those who have no hope. On this side of the cross, we know that all of our grief, sorrow, and sin has been borne by another for us. For there, on the cross, Jesus the ultimate grief-bearer, took our sins and sufferings upon himself so that we might not be consumed by your wrath or by the suffering that comes in this broken world. Because of his atoning work on our behalf, we not only experience salvation amidst sorrow, but we also have great confidence that one day all of our sorrow will be wiped away when Jesus returns to right all wrongs and cause us to walk with you in unbroken fellowship on a renewed earth. Oh Lord, we have great hope because of Jesus. And so we continue to submit ourselves to you just like Jesus did, trusting in your goodness and relying on the Holy Spirit to help us when we feel too exhausted to go on.

Strengthen us now in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION

Because Jesus drank the cup of wrath prepared for him, even in our most difficult circumstances, we're able to sing praise to God. This isn't trite triumphalism, this is the kind of resilient, steely faith that pours out our emotions and frustrations before God but then looks to the cross and in the deepest way sings, "Hallelujah, what a Savior!" Please stand as we sing that now.

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

This song we just sang calling sinners to come to Jesus—that's not a song directed at those people out there. That's a song meant to comfort *us*. *We* are those who are "weak and wounded, sick and sore," *we* are those who are "lost and ruined by the fall."

So how did Jesus save *us* sinners?

SCRIPTURE READING

Listen as I read from Mark 15:

²¹ And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. ²² And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). ²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. ²⁵ And it was the third hour when they crucified him. ²⁶ And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷ And with

him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!” ³¹ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

³³ And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

TRANSITION

Such a strange picture of salvation.

But as we see our Savior, in his suffering, in his cry, we see and hear something of our experience.

As a church, we’re going through a series in Lamentations, and in Scripture, we see a model for bringing to God, not only our praises and our thanksgiving, but also our sorrow and our grief. So would you join me in prayer now as we bring our sorrows to God?

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father,

Though we gather here this morning cleaned up on the outside, maintaining a cheerful exterior, Lord you know our hearts. We are those who are lost and ruined by the Fall. We represent all kinds of griefs, and sorrows, and burdens here this morning.

Oh God, you know the particular physical suffering that exists in this congregation. We are those who have been ravaged by all manners of sickness and disease—by cancers, by chronic illness, by incurable diseases, by mental illness, and much more. In our bodies, our minds, our emotions, we have felt the curse of the Fall. And God, we confess to you—this is hard. Oh God, surely You see the daily, moment by moment battles—the despair, the nausea, the pain, the loss of perspective, the endless and seemingly ineffective treatments. Oh God, surely you hear the cries and prayers of your people, in all this—as we pray for ourselves, for our loved ones, for our children.

And yet, so often those answers seem to come so slowly—or even not at all. Oh God, we know your promises to work good in our trials, but Lord we confess, oftentimes, we just don’t see it. It just doesn’t make any sense. So God, help us. Do not abandon us. See our suffering and act, in your mercy.

Oh God, we are a people who have seen death. Many here this morning grieve the death of a spouse, the death of a child, the death of a friend. We miss these loved ones. Our hearts ache. And the nights are long and lonely. Oh, Lord, we know from your Word that death was not initially a part of your creation. We know that death is your judgment on sin. But Lord, we pray, do not abandon us in your judgment. Because you more than any of us feel the wrongness of death. You are the God of life.

So even as we live in the midst of all this death, as we ourselves live in these dying bodies, oh Lord, do not

forsake us. Do not leave us in our sorrow. Please show us the light of your face.

Because in the midst of all this suffering and dying, our deepest sorrow is not our physical pain. Our deepest sorrow is the distance we feel from you. Our deepest sorrow is the fact that we are separated from you, our God, our Father. We do not see you face to face. We never have! And though we know and believe that you are here and that you have entered our world—still we live by faith and not by sight. We mourn that we are not with you now. In our suffering, we are again and again reminded of that separation, reminded of our sin, of the judgment we deserve, of your wrath against our sin. So God, please be merciful to us. Do not allow Satan to use our suffering to deceive us. In the midst of our suffering, hold on to us.

Oh God, we believe that you have provided the greatest answer to our suffering in the resurrection of your Son. Impress upon our hearts the truth and hope of the gospel. Help us to hear the comfort of the gospel louder than the condemnation of our pain. Help us to see Christ, our suffering Savior; our sympathetic High Priest. Cause our hearts to be satisfied in Him.

Be merciful to us. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

CONCLUSION

In the midst of our sorrows, we have a Savior who bore our sin and our griefs upon himself, who was forsaken by God, so that we might never be forsaken. That doesn't give us any easy answers. But it does give us hope.

Last Sunday evening, we learned a new hymn, based on Psalm 88, which is a psalm of lament. God is strong enough to bear our griefs, and so we can bring them to him. Let's remain seated as we continue to bring our hearts before God.

Thank God for . . . Government?

<https://www.9marks.org/article/thank-god-for-government/>

The criticism of government is probably as old as government itself, but it seems en vogue of late. A [recent Gallup poll](#) found that only nine percent of Americans said they have a “great deal” of confidence in the federal government when it comes to handling international problems, while nearly one in five said they had no confidence at all in Uncle Sam. Both numbers were lower when respondents offered their perspective on the federal government’s handling of domestic policies.

Often there are real blunders and evils that deserve a response. From corrupt local officials taking bribes, to congressmen who implode in scandal, to ineffective federal agencies, the failures of all levels of government are well-known to us. Government officials are rightly held to a higher bar than others, since their decisions and actions impact the public in unique ways.

Even stinging criticisms of government can be a kind of crude barometer of the degree of freedom of expression citizens enjoy. In some countries, the only “news outlets” are PR organs of the central government, like in North Korea. Even in Hong Kong, peaceful protests in critique of governmental actions have provoked harsh crackdowns by police. We can praise God for the freedoms of religion, assembly, and press that we enjoy.

Many criticisms of government also almost serve as proxies for larger debates over the role and size of government and its relationship to families, culture, industries, and private sector endeavors. These debates are deeply important and constructive in a free society.

But have you noticed how quickly substantive critique can quickly devolve into ungodly criticism? There is a fine line between the legitimate—even needed—criticism of a failed policy, and the caustic critique driven merely by egoism, partisan tribalism, or score-settling.

Unfettered, unrestrained critiques of government can be subtly corrosive—especially for evangelical Christians. Believers know how easily ugliness wells up in our hearts. So how do we honor God by not crossing the line between legitimate criticism and sinful bomb-throwing? Not only that, how do we give real thanks for a gift that God has given?

The Apostle Peter says to “Honor the emperor.” The Apostle Paul teaches that a government official is “God’s servant for your good” who should be respected and obeyed with a clean conscience. Our obedience to authority reflects to a watching world our fear of God and respect of his sovereign, ultimate authority.

Many suggest Paul gave his readers a general instruction, not a blanket statement. Certainly, Paul was no Pollyanna. After all, he was a citizen of the Roman Empire—an empire built through bloody conquest on the backs of conquered kingdoms. He understood something of the evils that can be perpetrated by fallen, human governments. Paul knew the same Roman army occupying Jerusalem was complicit in killing Jesus.

There is a place to discuss what responses are appropriate for Christians when a government fails, embraces systematized evil, corruption, violence, or even bad policies that dishonor people made in God’s image. There is an article to be written there, too, as a helpful complement to this one.

But Paul’s focus in Romans 13 was not on the character of the government itself; his focus was on the character of *God*. Paul was teaching that our response to the authority of the government is part of our honoring God by respecting all God-given authorities, whether in the church, family, or government. So, for our purposes here,

consider these four practical steps for cultivating a heart that demonstrates a biblical kind of honor and gratitude for the God-ordained authorities of government.

First, trust that God has ordained these authorities, and that obeying them is honoring him.

For instance, you honor God by paying your taxes. Did you know the IRS could be an agent of your sanctification?

God is sovereign and rules over all. We can trust his provision for us in our obedience in all circumstances. We can honor God by our obedience, even as we wait in long lines for construction permits, navigate a cumbersome process at the DMV, or wait at a stop light. In these quiet, routine moments, as law-abiding, authority-honoring Christians, we can bear witness to God and his ultimate authority.

Second, meditate on how government punishes evil.

Government officials, Paul says, are “agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”

Local governments take drunk drivers off the streets and slap fines on people who endanger others by running red lights and stop signs. Police and firefighters respond to calls of alarm, distress from physical and material threats. Law enforcement thwarts burglars, murderers, and thieves. They protect children from abusive parents and remove them from dangerous situations.

Praise God for that!

State and federal governments prosecute corrupt corporate and political leaders, thus providing more integrity and accountability in our commercial and civil arenas. They seek out and prosecute criminals who perpetrate unspeakable acts of evil, preying on children, the frail, and the elderly. Such officials apprehend and prosecute purveyors of child pornography and abuse. They thwart extremists and terrorists. They stop bombers and shooters. They enforce our laws against those who would use their wealth, power, status, or fame to harm people financially, emotionally, or physically.

Praise God for them!

While some—even in recent months—have been harmed by government officials who were supposed to protect them, such tragedies can provide a stark reminder of the imperfections and injustices of any human authority. In these darker moments, our hearts can be helped, even healed, by putting our hope in God and his perfect authority.

But even in these darker moments, a ray of light breaks through when we remember there are responsible individuals in government who seek to serve and protect their fellow citizens each day.

Praise God for them. What a wonderful common grace blessing their service can be to help provide security for those made in God’s image.

Third, reflect on how government can uphold the common good.

This is what Paul means in saying that government’s role is to be a “servant for good.” Like any good authority, when governmental authority is exercised with restraint and respect for those made in the image of God, the result can be life-giving, increasing the opportunities for the development and use of people’s God-given talents and skills.

Just think about how much good is done by a local city instituting laws to oversee and operate an integrated delivery system for clean water. How much more time is freed up for the study and teaching of God's Word than if every household had to maintain their own well? How many families and children are spared from illness and disease because the water is clean and pure?

Praise God for the men and women who help design systems to provide clean water for millions of people.

Or consider the role of government in enforcing laws related to commerce and the workplace. How many men and women are protected by government actions who would otherwise be exploited by monopolies or unethical business practices? We need only look at the work conditions and living situations of workers in some countries—or the black market in our own country—to see the benefit of clear rules that are consistently enforced.

One more example: air traffic controllers. Every day some 15,000 personnel at more than 300 locations help guide more than 87,000 flights around the nation. Every day. It is a huge operation. What good benefits come from the passenger and freight travel by air.

Praise God for the men and women who help operate a system which brings order out of chaos, which provides safety amidst risk.

Think about the common grace benefit of government officials who help establish and maintain our highway system, who test the safety of consumer vehicles or pharmaceutical drugs, or who inspect our borders, passports, ships, or bridges. Much of governmental work in enforcing laws helps establish safety and create order so that men and women made in the image of God may flourish.

Do you know anyone that has any of these jobs? Who do you know that works in government prosecuting evil or upholding good? Have you considered what it looks like to honor their role?

Have you thanked God for them? This brings us to a fourth point.

Finally, consider biblical examples of those who have honored God in government service.

God used believers in pagan governments to protect his people. Joseph served in Egypt's government and ultimately provided refuge and food for Jacob and his sons in a severe famine. Queen Esther won the king's favor and saved a people from genocide. Daniel and the three Hebrew boys, as war refugees, proclaimed God's truth before pagan kings and helped secure the freedom to worship God.

These are just a few examples of people who God used in government, not just to advance the good of a people, but to advance the glory of God. How would your heart toward the authority of government change if you started praying for Christian brothers and sisters in government to have wisdom in their work and boldness in their witness for the Gospel?

As Christians, we know that even the best of men are men at best. Even the most impressive government official is sinful and fallible. So while we never trust the individuals or institutions of government more than we trust God, we can praise God that he will preserve a remnant—in government—to bear witness to his goodness and advance his aims.

We can be thankful for the authorities God has ordained to punish evil and to uphold a common good. Remembering God's sovereignty, and his ultimate authority, can help us avoid sinful behaviors like ad hominem attacks or ugly name calling—even when making critiques of governmental authorities we seek to obey.

Authority and Its Abuse

Sadly, it's not uncommon for those in authority to abuse their authority. For example, consider these various examples:

From an [2013 article](#) about bad bosses in *The Washingtonian*:

A guy at my old company used to make his employees ask before they could use the restroom—and he would time them. If they were gone longer than five minutes, he would add the time up at the end of the week and make them use vacation time.

He made anyone late to a meeting stand in the corner for the entire time, and he had others who said anything particularly ‘stupid’ stand on their chair or the table.”

From Randi Kreger's book [*Stop Walking On Eggshells: Taking Your Life Back When Someone You Care About Has Borderline Personality*](#):

My dad used fear, guilt, intimidation, blaming, and manipulation to control my whole family. He's poisonous—the kind of person who has you doubting your own perceptions and beliefs. Life with him was a rollercoaster—up and down, for years and years. He'd rage and snarl one minute, and then apologize the next, and expect you to forget all about it. The constant instability and insecurity eventually rendered me completely numb. He refuses to take responsibility for his behavior, and acts like any rift in our relationship is my fault. I am trying to forgive him.

Or this, from the [*Department of Justice Report on Baltimore Police Department*](#):

We find reasonable cause to believe that BPD engages in a pattern or practice of discriminatory policing against African Americans. Statistical evidence shows that the Department intrudes disproportionately upon the lives of African Americans at every stage of its enforcement activities. BPD officers disproportionately stop African Americans; search them more frequently during these stops; and arrest them at rates that significantly exceed relevant benchmarks for criminal activity. African Americans are likewise subjected more often to false arrests. Indeed, for each misdemeanor street offense that we examined, local prosecutors and booking officials dismissed a higher proportion of African-American arrests upon initial review compared to arrests of people from other racial backgrounds. BPD officers also disproportionately use force—including constitutionally excessive force—against African-American subjects. Nearly 90 percent of the excessive force incidents identified by the Justice Department review involve force used against African Americans.

What these stories have in common is their consistent example of abusive authority. And when it happens, the results are often devastating. Devastating for a workplace, devastating for a family, devastating for an entire community of people. The greater the degree of authority, the greater the pain inflicted when it is abused.

If it's devastating in the world, how much more so in the church of Jesus Christ?

DEFINING AUTHORITY

Human authority is a delegated power to make decisions and bring laws of some type to bear on the one under

authority. And the Bible makes it clear that this is a good thing. Romans 13:1 says, “For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” In that context, it’s speaking about the governing authorities, but it’s true of all authority. There is no authority except from God.

Remember the conversation between Jesus and Pontius Pilate in John 19? So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” But Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”

Authority is good, because when used properly, it is a reflection of the power, wisdom, and love of God.

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

Abusive authority is the improper use of authority. Like all sin, it’s a distortion. It takes something good and God-ordained and uses it improperly. So, in order to understand the bad version, let’s think about what the good version is. And to see the good version, as one would predict, all we have to do is look at Jesus, because he is the epitome of everything good, and that includes authority.

This couldn’t be clearer when we arrive at a passage like John 10:1–11:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

In this passage, which comes on the heels of Jesus healing the man born blind, the Lord Jesus describes himself as the “good shepherd.” The shepherd/sheep imagery is rich in its Old Testament background and is a picture of how God relates to his people.

In Jesus’s culture, it would have been an obvious picture of authority. The shepherd has authority over the sheep. The shepherd decides where the sheep goes, when it’s time for the sheep to come in from the field. He feeds the sheep, cares for the sheep, corrects the sheep when they’re off. He clearly calls the shots. He has authority over the sheep.

But here’s where it gets surprising. Jesus uses his authority, not to hurt the sheep or take advantage and abuse the sheep. He uses his authority to bless the sheep. In this way, the authority of Jesus is protective, loving, and sacrificial.

Protective

Notice the end of verse 3: he “leads them out.” Notice also the middle of verse 4: “he goes before them.” The shepherd is in front so any predator, if they want to get to the sheep, have to get past him first. He uses his

authority to protect.

Loving

Jesus calls his own sheep by name (10:3). It's personal. He's not just taking care of a mass of worthless sheep, simply there to serve his purposes and meet his needs. Instead, he knows them and calls them each individually by name.

Sacrificial

In verse 11, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." This is shocking. While sheep certainly had value in that culture, the value of the sheep was nothing compared to the value of the shepherd. The shepherd would not be expected to endanger himself for the sheep, let alone die for them.

But that's exactly what Jesus does. The purpose of authority is for the good, the blessedness, and the flourishing of the one under authority. And that's exactly what Jesus says he uses his authority to accomplish in verse 9: "If anyone enters by me, he will be saved."

Saved from what? Saved from the wrath of God. That's what we deserve because of our sin. And we're all guilty. We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. So Jesus, through his death and resurrection, secures our greatest good, our most significant blessedness, the highest possible degree of flourishing imaginable. He saved us. Jesus used his power and authority to save us.

Jesus is contrasting himself with both the leaders of his day *and* the bad shepherds from the past. As Jesus makes this contrast, it would have drawn the minds of his listeners back to texts like Ezekiel 34.

ISRAEL'S ABUSIVE SHEPHERDS

Here's what Ezekiel says in Ezekiel 34:1–10:

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, (I can't imagine anything worse that can be said. But that is exactly what God says to those who abuse and I will

require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.”

Jesus, as the good shepherd, is the fulfillment of what’s being prophesied here. But notice the specific critiques of Israel’s shepherds that all fit into what Jesus says about the thieves and robbers in John 10.

God’s critique of Israel’s shepherds is communicated in the following ten ways:

- They feed themselves and not the sheep. (34:2)
- They eat the fat. (34:3)
- They clothe themselves with wool. (34:3)
- They slaughter the fat ones. (34:3)

In other words, just like the thieves and robbers Jesus mentions in John 10, these shepherds are stealing from the sheep for their own shameful gain. But there’s more:

- They have not strengthened the weak. (34:4)
- They have not healed the sick. (34:4)
- They have not bound up the injured. (34:4)
- They have not brought back the straying. (34:4)
- They have not sought the lost. (34:4)
- They have ruled with force and harshness. (34:4)

In other words, just like the thief and robber, these shepherds kill and destroy the sheep through their negligence.

Notice the abuse of authority in this passage isn’t so much seen in how they treated the strong, but how they treated the weak, the sick, the injured, the straying, the lost (34:4). They saw the weak not as precious souls in God’s sight in need of strengthening, but as annoyances. They saw the sick, not as chosen and beloved, but as an inconvenience. They saw the injured as in the way and slowing down the ministry. They saw the straying, as not worth the time to pursue. They saw the lost as hopeless. They abused the sheep because they didn’t have eyes to see the sheep as God saw them.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Unfortunately, this is far too often the case today. The apostle Peter, in giving instruction to under-shepherds, picks up on some of these themes in 1 Peter 5:1–5:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

My assumption is none of you want to abuse the authority given to you by God. And my guess is that those who have given in to the temptation to be abusive in their exercise of authority didn't go into ministry with the goal of being an abusive pastor. My guess is, like most sin, it happened gradually and subtly. Hebrews 3:13 talks about the "deceitfulness of sin" for a reason.

Looking at 1 Peter 5:2, do you notice whose flock it is? It's God's flock. Not your flock. It's God's. They're God's sheep. And notice where they are: "among you." Not beneath you. What this verse most certainly does *not* say is, "Subdue your own flock that is under you."

And yet, so much of pastoring today looks like that. But we must ask Peter, how do we do this? How do we shepherd the flock of God that's among us? He tells us how.

First, he says, "exercise oversight." There's the authority—power delegated by God. The meaning of "authority" there is important: "to look intently with the aim of caring for the one looked upon." That aim is also important: to care for the one under authority. Then he gives instructions in three pairs, each one stated negatively and then positively. Each of these is meant to help pastors, to help us avoid abusing authority.

Not under compulsion, but willingly — (Pride)

This gets at our motives. It causes us to search our hearts and ask ourselves, *Why are we in ministry?* That's a good question to ask. *Why are you in ministry?* Or why do you *desire* to go into ministry? This is an important question, because we all know the right answers. For the glory of God. The spread the gospel. To help and serve people. Those are right, biblical answers. But having the right answer isn't enough. I'm sure all those in our circles who have given into the sin of abusing their authority all had the right answer.

People enter the ministry for all kinds of reasons. Here are some bad ones.

1. The desire for power

Some people crave power. They like the idea of being the boss, of being in charge. They like people having to do what they say. It might be because they felt powerless as a child, and now they have an opportunity to exert the power they always desired but never had.

2. The desire for affirmation

Some people, more than anything else, just want to be affirmed. This is the person who craves compliments and lives on applause. It feels good to be affirmed, and for this person, they get an opportunity every week to be told they're doing a great job. Of course, for many, this backfires when they get called to a congregation that criticizes more than affirms; these brothers often get crushed under the burden of criticism.

3. The desire for respect

There's a respect that comes from the office. I once heard about a guy who insisted that the congregation not call him by his first name but call him by his title.

I can't help but wonder if that guy ever read Matthew 23: "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ."

Nothing's wrong with being rabbi, teacher, or instructor. But there *is* something very wrong with glorying in it.

Because glorying in it is a manifestation of pride. That's why Jesus immediately says: "The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

4. The desire for a "platform"

This is why big conferences can be dangerous. Because no matter how careful the organizers are, it can reinforce the false notion that the most faithful pastors are the pastors with the biggest ministries and the most pronounced gifts. It's sadly ironic, but the reality is that the bigger the "platform," the more challenging it will become to be among the flock and shepherd well. For some reason we've separated preaching from shepherding. That was never meant to be because they go hand in hand. I love what Anthony Carter says about why he doesn't speak at more conferences: "God hasn't called me to shepherd the world, but the flock."

Not for shameful gain, but eagerly — (Greed)

This was explicitly stated in Ezekiel 34 and implied by Jesus in John 10 when he said thieves and robbers steal. The warning against greed is a constant warning in Scripture. There's going to be a temptation to use the church's money for our own sinful ends. This is why financial accountability is so important—two signers for every check.

Not domineering, but being examples to the flock – (Power)

Here are a few ways to be domineering

- to not listen
- to retaliate when criticized. I know of one person, whenever he was criticized would sit people down from ministry
- using the Word to make your point rather than making your points from the Word
- by equating your suggestions with the Bible and binding people's consciences
- to command obedience where the Word does not command it.

That's how to rule harshly.

CONCLUSION

Brothers, we must realize pride is at the root of every abuse of authority—in the home, in the workplace, in the church, everywhere. We must also realize humility is the key to avoiding it. Surely this is Peter's point in 1 Peter 5:5—"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

To be sure, many will mistake the use of authority for its abuse. In those moments:

- pray
- show a deep and genuine humility by listening to how your actions might have been perceived, even wrongly perceived
- lean on your fellow elders
- teach congregationalism as an insurance against authoritarian leadership
- truly live *among* your people through regular visits and conversation that yield a general awareness of their spiritual well-being.

There's more to say on this subject, but I'll leave you with my own exhortation fueled by the words of Peter: "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed . . . use your authority to empower others."

<https://www.9marks.org/article/authority-and-its-abuse/>

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Redeeming Authority for Those Who've Only Known Its Abuse

When I was a young boy, the word "authority" was synonymous with the word "abuse." My guardians, be they Foster-Carers or Children's Home staff, abused their power and authority in so many different ways. As I grew older, the police became my authoritarian hate figures, many of whom abused their powers, too. Often I would be stopped on the streets and searched with no warrant other than a police officer's shrugging admittance, "Because I can, son."

School wasn't any better. As soon as I felt able, I rebelled completely. I went from a A-student to an, "I couldn't care less" student almost overnight. My rebellion wasn't borne out of a frustrated inability to learn (I was bright) but out of a perverse delight in rebelling against any and all authority figures in my life.

As a child, I suffered [bona fide torture](#) at the hands of adults. In response I tried my best to behave—to be "good," to toe the line. It didn't work. Still I would be mercilessly assaulted. When I responded by misbehaving and becoming uncooperative the abuse continued unabated. I soon realized it made no difference whether I behaved or not. Those who had authority over me abused it regardless.

As I now write these words as a pastor of an evangelical church in an inner city area of Edinburgh, Scotland, I know little has changed. Abuse is as commonplace here as buying milk from the local supermarket.

ABUSIVE PASTORS AND ABUSED CHURCH MEMBERS

Yet as I read the Scripture, one thing is clear. Pastors are called to shepherd the sheep, not abuse them. That needs repeating constantly, particularly within the context of an evangelical grapevine (read: internet) awash with horror stories of abusive pastors and churches hanging poor, innocent members out to dry. There are bloggers and so-called discernment sites scanning the evangelical cyber world—CIA like—for keywords such as "authority" or "discipline" in an effort to protect the innocent masses from ecclesiastical terrorism.

And who can blame them? It's not like the stories of mismanaged discipline issues in churches are a rarity. With the downfall of high-profile pastors in recent years for "abusive patterns" of behavior, they have plenty of ammunition with which to arm themselves.

But here's the question: as a pastor who has also suffered abuse, how do I respond to the abused sufferers and anti-authoritarian people in my care in a way that's biblical, loving, and true to God's revealed Word?

Here are six ways:

1. My starting point has to be Scripture, not my personal experience.

Deeply wounded as I may be, the Word is perfect, sure, and true. It's the abuse of it by people that is at fault. The Word should be trusted 100 percent. God, regardless of how I feel, has my best interests at heart.

2. We must teach our people that submission to authority is a God-honoring act.

In Romans 13:1–2, Paul tells us we’re all subject to authorities whether we like it or not. The context there is civil government. But in Hebrews 13:17, we read that church members should submit to those in leadership over them in. Therefore, the question for the Christian is not, ‘Should we submit to our leaders?’ but, ‘How do we submit to them in a way that is biblical and wise?’ I’ve checked and there’s not a pass on this for those of us who come from abused backgrounds.

3. We must avoid the “pendulum effect.”

The tendency of those of us who have suffered abuse is to respond in a completely opposite direction. So, for example, because I was badly beaten as a child, I make the decision not to effect any discipline in my own children’s lives. While a reasonable human response to my abuse, it’s not a biblical position when I read in Proverbs 13:24, “Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.” Then there are churches that shrink back from authority so as to not be seen as abusive. This in itself is a form of abuse. People are allowed to behave and do what they like without any fear of recrimination. Picture a house of errant teenagers being allowed to behave as they please without any discipline. We have to be careful to avoid extremes. We should not avoid exercising loving authority any more than we should exercise it excessively.

4. One of the best challenges to pastoral excess and abuse is a strong eldership.

For those leaders who love to quote Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:3 reminds them of their responsibility in how they are to exercise authority. A strong eldership guards against the one-man band approach of so many churches. A dominant, unchecked personality leading the church can, and has been, a recipe for disaster. It leaves us open to abusive patterns of authority. In our small church, we have six elders, and the other five act as a good failsafe against my strong personality and sinful inclinations. I have lost many a vote on my eldership, which, while frustrating, is good for my humility. I’ve also been talked out of making many poor decisions! Without a plurality of leaders, it’s far too easy for strong personalities such as mine to run roughshod over the local church. It also guards against personal animosity. We’d be lying if we said we absolutely love everyone in our churches. Some people frustrate the absolute life out of us and so having an eldership mitigates against treating them unfavorably. But, you, say aren’t elders just as open to abusing their authority? Of course they are.

5. That’s why the best challenge to an abusive eldership is healthy, biblical congregationalism.

In our church we have the following process when it comes to matters of discipline:

- We expect 95% of problems between members to be settled in accordance with Matthew 18 principles, before any elder even hears about it.
- If it cannot be resolved one-on-one, then take a mature Christian with you.
- Serious cases come to the elders.
- If it cannot be resolved by us, then we take the fifth step of going to the church members.

These steps aren’t a perfect failsafe against error, but they do seriously mitigate the chance of pastoral and leadership abuse in the lives of our people. Above all, as pastors and elders we should admit our fallibilities. I know pastors who think it’s a sign of weakness to admit our failings and uncertainty to the membership. On the contrary, I think it installs confidence in the leaders of a church. When we come to the congregation for serious cases of church discipline, we’re holding ourselves and our decisions up to the wider scrutiny of the whole

body. Again, at every point, this mitigates against either heavy-handedness or pastoral cowardice.

6. We must offer worthwhile examples to others.

Those of us who have known abuse must now, in Christ, work to be good and faithful husbands, who love our wives and deal with our children well. Those of us from broken homes need good models of leadership and authority in every area of our lives, both inside and outside the church. In our home, we have an open-door policy, which sees guests at our table for every meal—sometimes even living in our home. We can teach many of the principles above from the Word but, more than that, those who have experienced abusive authority need to *see* living illustrations of how family members handle conflict in a way that's biblical, loving, *and* authoritative.

CONCLUSION

Much of the abuse I see in the lives of the people among whom I minister is borne out of neglect—a neglect of parental responsibility and a failure to set clear rules and boundaries. The answer for the church is not to neglect our duty out of a misguided sense of love, but to ensure that when we do lead, we do so sensitively, lovingly, firmly, and well.

<https://www.9marks.org/article/redeeming-authority-for-those-who-ve-only-known-its-abuse/>

Should Christians Be Cops and Soldiers?

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-christians-be-cops-and-soldiers>

Audio Transcript

Happy Friday, everyone. We're continuing our discussion on God, guns, and biblical manhood we started in [episode 306](#) and picked up last time, in [episode 317](#). There's more to say about guns and biblical manhood especially for those in law enforcement and the military. Pastor John, pick up your train of thought from yesterday's episode.

Last time, Tony, I raised the question: Is the possibility of someone going to hell if you kill him a sufficient warrant for not killing him. And I answered no. This question today is: Is the New Testament commandment not to return evil for evil a sufficient warrant for a Christian not to be a soldier or a policeman. And the reason that seems so relevant, and several of our policeman friends asked it, is that the New Testament is filled with statements to this effect.

This is [Romans 12:14, 19-21](#): “Bless those who persecute you. . . . Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.’”

Spheres of Justice

Now the question is when a policeman reads that, or a soldier reads that, should they say: “Well, I guess I have got the wrong job, because I am not waiting for God to take vengeance. I am involved in it right now. I am returning evil for evil, harm for harm. I am not turning the other cheek with my billy club. I don't give to him who asks to let him go on beating that woman. I hit him and stop him.”

“The spheres that make society work have God-ordained situations that demand we not turn the other cheek.”

And so my answer to the question: “Do those texts prevent a person from being a policeman or soldier?” Is no. In fact, I would go further and say: God has arranged that the spheres that make society work, all of them have God ordained situations in them that demand that we not turn the other cheek. The spheres I have in mind are: The state, the family, business and commerce, the Church. God has built in to each of these spheres the necessary principle of justice, not just the principle of mercy where you treat people better than they deserve. In other words, treating a person as he deserves as well as sometimes treating him better than he deserves is essential for the loving, just working of these spheres.

Let me just give you four biblical examples.

1. The state

[Romans 13:4](#): “He is God's servant for your good. . . . an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.” So he is talking about soldiers and policemen, there, that carry the sword. They don't turn the other cheek. They do strike in order to defend the father-land or to defend the innocent citizen who is being victimized of a crime. So, state.

2. Commerce and business

Paul said, [2 Thessalonians 3:10](#): “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” That is not mercy. That is justice. The employer does not turn the other cheek. If a man doesn’t come to work, day-after-day, and says: “I just don’t feel like it,” he gets fired. He gets paid less. You can’t run a business without the principle of merit, without the principle of a day’s work for a day’s wage.

3. Family

[Ephesians 6:4](#): “Fathers . . . bring [your children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Parents who only turn the other cheek, and do not return spanking for insolence, breed brats, not pacifists. And the Bible is so clear. Parents have the right to operate on the principle of justice as well as mercy. You have to spank you children, discipline your children.

4. The church

Church discipline, [1 Corinthians 5:5](#): “You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”

Mercy and Justice

In all of these we are hoping for the good of people, but in the short run we are not giving to him who asks. We are not turning the other cheek. We are returning some measure of harm because of behaviors that were harmful or wrong.

So the point is this: Each of these teachings of the New Testament show that a just and loving society, inside and outside the Church, requires more than not returning evil for evil. It also requires, in the spheres where God assigns it, a principle of justice that returns what a person deserves. So my answer to the question is “No.” Is the New Testament commandment not to return evil for evil a sufficient warrant for a Christian not being policeman or a soldier? No.

Both of these, that is treating a person according to justice and treating him according to mercy, are essential in bearing witness to our God. Just like I said last time, in our personal Christian readiness to suffer and be cheated without vengeance, we display something utterly crucial about God. He is our all-satisfying treasure, and he will reward us fully in the end, and he will settle all accounts at the end time. And, secondly, when we function as a policeman, or soldier, or parent, or employer, or church elder, we also apply the principle of justice and display something else about God, namely, he has ordained that even in this world, even in the church, there be a limit to evil and display of justice.

So there is just no doubt. I mean, I realize as people are listening to this they are saying, “Whoa. Those two principles are going to collide.”

They are going to collide in my life. And my answer is: Absolutely they are going to collide. This way of living creates tensions. They bump into each other. And that is just the way it has to be, it seems to me, in a partially redeemed world.



A brief introduction to the just war tradition: Jus ad bellum

[August 17, 2017](#) by [Joe Carter](#)

What are the moral reasons for going to war? What does justice require of us when engaging in warfare? What are our ethical obligations to our enemy once warfare has ceased?

The attempt to answer these questions has led to the development of just war theory and the just war tradition. The theoretical aspect of military ethics concerned with morally justifying war and the forms that warfare may or may not take is called just war theory. The history of just war thought and its application to specific wars is referred to as the just war tradition. The Christian just war tradition is therefore the history of how just war theory has been conceived and applied in Christian thought and ethics. (Hereafter, “JWT” will refer to the Christian just war tradition.)

In this five part series on the Christian just war tradition we’ll examine the three main areas of just war theory: jus ad bellum (the moral requirement for going to war), jus in bello (the moral requirements for waging war), and jus post bellum (moral requirements after warfare is concluded). We’ll also look at how the just war tradition applies to terrorism and the use of nuclear weapons.

The Biblical and Christian Roots of the Just War Tradition

The Christian tradition of just war theory began in the fifth century with Augustine. Augustine’s view of justice in warfare can be summed up by his statement that, “We do not seek peace in order to be at [war](#), but we go to [war](#) that we may have peace. Be peaceful, therefore, in warring, so that you may vanquish those whom you [war](#) against, and bring them to the prosperity of peace.”

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas built on and expanded Augustine’s thought on justice and warfare. Later Christian thinkers have added nuance and commentary on the JWT, but the main principles we still use today are those derived from Augustine and Aquinas.

The JWT of Augustine and Aquinas is rooted in Romans 13:3-4: “For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. For it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God’s servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.” As [Marc LiVecche explains](#),

Paul’s emphasis on the good of government helps signal the just war tradition as essentially eudaemonist – that is, it promotes genuine human flourishing. It accomplishes this through fidelity to the fundamental Christian duty of neighbor love. This principle norm makes a universal anthropological assertion: All human beings, including our enemies, are right objects of love. This is because in the biblical view every human individual is made in the image of God and has a particular call to exercise dominion and participate in the care, and salvation, of the world. From this universal assertion that every human being enjoys equal dignity there issues a consequent universal command: All human beings are to love every other.

The way in which just war promotes the love and flourishing of the neighbor under assault should be quite clear. In order to flourish through properly responding to our created call, human beings need to enjoy those goods which make any such response possible. Most basically, of course, this includes the good of life. Because of this, the primary good for which government exercises responsibility is the provision of basic security characterized by order, justice, and peace without which no degree of human flourishing, including life, can long persevere.

As LiVecche notes, these goods correspond directly to the conditions necessary for a just resort to force.

The Principles of Jus ad Bellum

There are six criteria that must be satisfied before entering war can be considered just:

1. *Just Cause* – There must be a just and proper reason for going to war. Some of the justifiable reasons include self-defense, protecting the innocent (e.g., preventing genocide), restoring human rights wrongly denied, and assisting an ally in their self-defense.
2. *Proportionate Cause* – The good of going to war must outweigh the destruction and death that will be caused by warfare. In other words, going to war must prevent more evil and suffering than it is expected to cause.
3. *Right Intention* – Our reasons and motives for engaging in warfare must noble and in line with the ethic of Christian love. We can go to war to right a wrong or restore a just peace but not to restore our “national pride” or to seek revenge against an enemy.
4. *Right Authority* – War can only be authorized by a legitimate governing authority. This means it has to be a governing authority we would recognize as fitting the criteria of Romans 13. But it also means that the proper governing authority has actual sovereign authorization to engage in war. For example, the President of the United States has the proper authority to initiate warfare against Canada while the governor of North Dakota does not.
5. *Reasonable Chance of Success* – The initiation of warfare brings violence, pain, and suffering. This cost is only worth paying if it will, as we noted, outweigh the destruction and death that will be caused by warfare. If there is no reasonable chance of success in warfare there can be no reasonable chance of using warfare to restore a just peace.
6. *Last Resort* – Engaging in warfare must be the last reasonable and workable option for addressing problems. Any peaceful alternatives, such as diplomacy or non-violent political pressure, must first be exhausted before going to war.

All of these criteria must be met before a nation can be justified in going to war. However, because these criteria are open-ended and subject to interpretation, it is often a matter of contention among Christians about whether the standard has been satisfied before war has been declared or entered into. For example, there has been no war in American history in which Christians did not disagree about whether it met the standard of the just war tradition.

Next in the Series: In our next article, we’ll look at the criteria for justly engaging in warfare.



A brief introduction to the just war tradition: Jus in bello

[August 24, 2017](#) by [Joe Carter](#)

Note: This is the second in a series on the Christian just war tradition.

In 2014, Clint Eastwood directed *American Sniper*, a war drama loosely based on the memoir of the late Navy SEAL Chris Kyle. The trailer for the film reveals the difficult, split-second decisions military snipers often have to make while in combat.

American Sniper - Official Trailer [HD]



For many viewers of the film, the most surprising part of that scene was when his spotter says, “They fry you if you’re wrong. They send [you] to Leavenworth.” He’s saying that if Kyle shoots the boy and child turns out not to have been a threat, the sniper can be convicted of murder and sent to the military correctional facility at Fort Leavenworth.

Why would a decision on a rooftop in Iraq lead to a prison cell in Kansas? Because of the U.S. military’s rules of engagement (ROE).

ROE and Just Warfare

The [ROE for Iraq](#) required both a “reasonable certainty that the proposed target is a legitimate military target” and that civilians could not be targeted “except in self-defense to protect yourself, your unit, friendly forces, and designated persons or property under your control.”

Those who falsely believe that the purpose of the military is “[to kill people and break things](#)” may find such ROEs to be not only unnecessary but also counterproductive to warfare. But as Marine Corps [Major Wade C. Reaves explains](#), “The US and the international community derive ROE from the theory Jus In Bello, the morally proper conduct of war, which provides guidance on how combatants will engage the enemy and non-combatants in hostile situations.”

In my [last article](#), we looked at the first main area of the Christian just war tradition that deals with *jus ad bellum* the moral requirement for going to war. Now we turn to the second area, *jus in bello*, the criteria for justly engaging in warfare.

The Principles of Jus in Bello

Historically, Christian thinkers have proposed two primary criteria for just execution of war, discrimination and proportionality.

Discrimination – The criterion of discrimination includes two key components, “innocence” and “deliberate attack.” The first rule of just warfare is that we do not target or kill the innocent. In this context, the term innocence refers to whether individuals are able cause direct harm—whether willingly or reluctantly—either to us or to our military forces that are engaged in just warfare. Such people are considered “noncombatants” and are immune from attack because they meet the qualification of innocence.

As the late Christian ethicist Jean Bethke Elshtain explained, “Discrimination refers to the need to differentiate between combatants and noncombatants. Noncombatants historically have been women, children, the aged and infirm, all unarmed persons going about their daily lives, and prisoners of war who have been disarmed by definition.” [Lubomir Martin Ondrasek adds](#) that it is important to note that Elshtain’s understanding of this criterion underscores that civilians can *never* be intentionally targeted by countries in war.

The second component of discrimination is “deliberate attack.” While the innocent may be harmed because of our engaging in warfare, it must not be our intention. In their book, [The Just War Tradition: Ethics in Modern Warfare](#), Charles Guthrie and Michael Quinlan outline three key provisos to meet this standard:

- (1) The death of innocents must genuinely not be part of the real purpose of the combat operation, or positively necessary to fulfill the legitimate military objective. It must, in other words, be an unwelcome side effect rather than an intentional targeting.
- (2) We must do all that we reasonably can, consistent with not gravely endangering the legitimate military purpose, to minimize the risks of noncombatants to a minimum.
- (3) The likely harm to noncombatants must not be out of proportion to the expected military benefit.

Proportionality – The criterion of proportionality in waging warfare is similar to the criterion of “proportionate cause” in deciding to go to war: The good of going to war must outweigh the destruction and death that will be caused by warfare. In other words, going to war must prevent more evil and suffering than it is expected to cause.

As Elshtain explains, proportionality “requires that the nature of one’s coercive force should be proportional to any injury sustained or planned, and that at whatever minimal force can be used to do the job should be deployed.”

There is increasingly becoming an additional requirement for proportionality in modern warfare. As Guthrie and Quinlan note, this factor is the “duty to think carefully about the effect of military operations on the subsequent maintenance of reasonable living conditions and order for the people of the country where the conflict happen.”

This moral requirement after warfare is the latest addition to the tradition of just war theory, and one we’ll take up in our examination of *jus post bellum*.

Next in the Series: In our next article, we’ll look at the criteria for justly engaging in post-conflict situations.



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Blue Knights

with [Lt. Dan Marcou](#)

Street Survival: When it comes to using deadly force, are you a P.O. or a C.O.?

All officers must ask themselves if they can take the life of another if that dire decision is thrust upon them by fate or circumstance

Jun 14, 2019

Editor's Note:

This article is part of a series by Lt. Dan Marcou. [Click here](#) to access all of Dan's street survival lessons.

“Heads up!”

Remember that? When you were a kid, and you least expected it, one of your friends would shout that phrase and launch a football or a basketball in your direction. If your reactions were sharp enough, you caught it and, if not, you fumbled the ball.

That’s about how suddenly deadly threats develop at times for officers except without anyone having the courtesy to shout, “Heads up!”



No matter what your job assignment, you need to continually prepare yourself for your “heads-up” moment. (Photo/PoliceOne)

FUMBLED BALLS

Two high-profile incidents recently resulted in – to continue the analogy – fumbled balls.

In the aftermath of these incidents, [former officer Mohamed Noor is facing prison](#) after being convicted in Minnesota for what has been deemed by a jury to be not only an overreaction, but “murder.” In the second case, former [SRO Scott Peterson](#) finds himself charged by a prosecutor for criminal neglect for an underreaction to the [Parkland school shooting](#).

These cases have inspired me to discuss some impediments to making good decisions when an

officer is suddenly thrust into a deadly force decision-making event.

Whether you are an entry-level officer or a veteran you need to be aware if one of these three conditions describe your psyche before someone’s life is on the line and your reactions mean the difference between life or death:

1. Conscientious Objector

For those of you who have read the book “[On Killing](#)” by Colonel David Grossman, you realize it is not a natural thing for a human to take a life of another human, even when there is clear justification to do so. Colonel Grossman explains how there is a natural resistance in most, to killing.

When a police officer has to use deadly force to save innocents from a killer, that officer must be unencumbered and purposeful in his mission. They must be able to seek out that killer, take aim and fire a bullet into a vital area to stop the threat.

To be able to do this while making the right decision in doing so takes not only a great deal of ongoing training, but also a quantum of soul-searching in advance to determine that the officer is a P.O. (Police Officer) who can do what needs to be done, and not a C.O. (Conscientious Objector), who can’t.

Now is a good time to do that soul-searching. Ask yourself if you can take the life of another if that dire decision is thrust on you by fate and/or circumstance.

As a career-long field training officer and survival trainer I have had officers on more than one occasion state, "I would rather take one in the chest than ever shoot someone."

After hearing this, I followed up with this question in each case, "Knowing this, why did you get into law enforcement?"

Their answer was that they wanted to be a police officer to help people. They felt since most officers never have to fire their weapon the odds were in their favor that they might never have to shoot someone. One stated he would just count on someone else doing it.

At least these officers knew they were conscientious objectors. Not all officers are aware they are C.O.s until it's too late.

If you know you would be unable to fire your duty weapon at a deadly threat, you should find another career.

2. Nervous in the Service

Another condition that can have a debilitating effect on an officer in a deadly situation is being "nervous in the service." Now let's be clear that I am not talking about the presence of fear. [Fear is a normal reaction](#) to many challenges and is felt by police officers universally.

However, being "nervous in the service" is when out-of-control fear is so debilitating that it causes an officer to freeze, over-react, or under react. All three can lead to unacceptable results.

Controlling and properly channeling fear is what great cops do well.

3. A Dulled Edge

Another situation that often prohibits an effective response in a deadly situation can be called the "dulled edged." Some officers have been assigned to administrative duties, or "officer-friendly" positions for many years and have few, if any, recent critical experiences. In addition, because of their position they may be rarely offered survival-training opportunities. The survival edge that was once sharp and continually honed through training and experiences may be considerably dulled slowing their reaction time and hampering their critical decision-making

capability.

This can also occur in the veteran street officer whose edge has been dulled by complacency and the failure to train.

UNACCEPTABLE CORRECTIVE OPTIONS

Officers, who suffer from these conditions too often:

1. Seek out a position in law enforcement where they believe they won't ever be put into a position where they will have to shoot someone.
2. Deliberately avoid hot calls, or let others arrive first.
3. Go about their day-to-day business of policing and hope a critical situation never happens.

CONCLUSION

No matter what your job assignment, you need to continually prepare yourself for your "heads-up" moment by:

1. Mentally preparing for what you may someday have to do. If you are a C.O., do not accept any armed protective position in law enforcement.
2. Making certain that no matter what your duty assignment is your [survival training](#) is realistic, repetitious, regular, recent and at the ready.
3. Don't pray that *it* never happens to you. Pray instead that when innocents are endangered by an evil predator, that it will be you that gets that call, because you realize that when things are at their worst, is when you are at your best!

With that said, heads up!

About the author

Lt. Dan Marcou is an internationally-recognized police trainer who was a highly-decorated police officer with 33 years of full-time law enforcement experience. Marcou's awards include Police Officer of the Year, SWAT Officer of the Year, Humanitarian of the Year and Domestic Violence Officer of the Year. Upon retiring, Lt. Marcou began writing. He is a co-author of "[Street Survival II, Tactics for Deadly Encounters](#)," which is now available. His novels, "The Calling, the Making of a Veteran Cop," "SWAT, Blue Knights in Black Armor," "Nobody's Heroes" and "Destiny of Heroes," as well as his latest non-fiction offering, "Law Dogs, Great