

# Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe

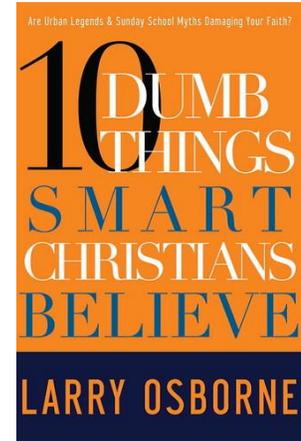
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## Introduction

Have you seen the show *Myth Busters*? Can someone describe it for me?

That is what we are going to do for the next several weeks on Sunday nights here at the Hixson Campus. We are going to test some statements that you might have heard (even in church) related to Christian beliefs.

Let me read you an extended excerpt from the book that I am borrowing from for this series—*10 Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe*: (and feel free to get a copy of it and read along as we go through it):



**Osborne: It is no news flash that smart people can *do* some pretty dumb things. But lots of times we forget that smart people can also *believe* some pretty dumb things. . . .**

**History is filled with examples of otherwise intelligent people who acted upon amazingly goofy assumptions—and paid a high price for doing so.**

**We, as Christians, aren't immune. Even a highly moral, deeply sincere, smart Christian, with the best theological pedigree, has no guarantee of protection from the consequences of a bad decision based on flawed assumptions. . . .**

**And therein lies the reason for this book.**

**Over the years, I've counseled and worked with many people who have made life-altering decisions based on what they perceived to be biblical principles, only to discover too late that what they thought was biblical didn't come from the Bible at all.**

**Most of the time, they were victims of a spiritual urban legend. A *spiritual urban legend* is just like a secular urban legend. It's a belief, story, assumption, or truism that gets passed around as fact. In most cases the source is a friend, a Sunday-school class, a Bible study, a devotional, a book, or even a sermon.**

**Because they sound so plausible and come from a reputable source, spiritual urban legends are often accepted without question and then quickly passed on. Once widely disseminated, they tend to take on a life of their own. They become almost impossible to refute because "everyone" knows they're true. Anyone who dares to question their veracity gets written off as spiritually dull, lacking in faith, or liberal.**

**Admittedly, the consequences of some spiritual misconceptions aren't particularly devastating. . . .**

**But far too often the consequences are spiritually devastating. Think of the disillusionment that sets in when someone writes off God for failing to keep a promise that He never made.** In our song service this morning at this campus, one singer sang this line, “You are everything you've promised.” Oftentimes, we ascribe to God promises He never made and then we live with the disillusionment. **Or the despair that follows a step of faith that turns out to have been a leap onto thin ice. . . .**

**My bet is that you've already seen through a few. Others you may have always questioned, but until now you thought you were the only one who didn't “buy it.” Some may rock your boat. But whatever the case, I encourage you to examine each one with an open mind and an open Bible. . . .**

**Yet I want to make it clear that nothing in these pages is meant as an attack on the people who believe these things. They themselves aren't dumb. Their assumptions and beliefs are. If I'd had more room in the title, I would have called this book *Ten Dumb Things That Smart, Sincere, Good, and Godly Christians Believe*.**

**Each one of these spiritual urban legends is a bit like fool's gold. It looks great at first glance, but once tested, it proves worthless. No doubt we've all jumped to some pretty foolish conclusions in our life. I know I have. (pp. 1-6)**

When Darrell asked me if I had something I wanted to teach, this is why I picked this: (1) to encourage us to look to Scripture to **test all things** (exactly like **1 Thessalonians 5:21** commands) and (2) to remove the disillusionment that comes when we rely on promises that God **never** made.

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- (1) Faith Can Fix Anything

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- (3) A Godly Home Guarantees Godly Kids

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## Dumb Thing #1: Faith Can Fix Anything

### John's faith and Susan's cancer

Osborne tells the story in his book of a husband who prayed for his wife's healing and had complete confidence that she would be healed because he had complete faith. All of us probably have heard of Christians who have prayed for something to happen one way (perhaps with an illness or a financial difficulty) only to have the events unfold the opposite of what was prayed for.

**Osborne: The word on the street is that faith is a potent mixture of intellectual and emotional self-control that when properly harnessed can literally change outcomes through positive thinking and clear visualization. (p. 9)**

### Why positive thinking can't change anything

I hate to break it to you, but the Vincent Normal Peale's book (*The Power of Positive Thinking*) was wrong. Positive thinking might help us focus. Positive thinking might help us hone our efforts. But positive thinking doesn't **force** God to do anything. God is the Lord of all creation and is not subject to me or my wishes—I am subject to Him. Many times our 'faith' is merely faith in our own plans as opposed to faith in God's plan.

**Bill Brandenburg: If you can replace, "In Jesus' name I pray," with, "Ready, set, go!" at the end of your prayers, you might have an idol problem.**

**Osborne: God doesn't care if we've mastered the art of positive thinking. . . . He's not impressed by the mental gymnastics of visualization. (p. 12)**

### The big problem with faith in faith

Faith must have an **object**. Faith in God is good. Faith in faith is vain, empty, and worthless. Faith is powerful when its object is God and not faith.

There is a myth that exists in the world that says if we have enough faith we will always be successful. The biblical reality is that faith is trusting God to fulfill His promises.

Let's look at **Hebrews 11:1: Now faith** [Greek = *pistis*, meaning the conviction of the truth of a thing] **is the substance** [Greek = *hupostasis*, meaning the substructure or the foundation—the thing in which we place our confidence] **of things hoped for, the evidence** [proof, conviction] **of things not seen.**

Faith is the substructure. Faith is not a feeling. Our faith is based on the truthfulness of what we believe. Faith is the firm ground we stand on because it is based on what God has promised us. Faith is not whatever you want it to be; faith is the present essence of a future **reality**.

Jump down to **Hebrews 11:6: But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.**

Do you want to please God? There is only one way: faith.

### How the English language mucks up everything

Osborne: For most of us, the word *faith* conjures up an image of confidence. It's the opposite of fear and doubt. It's often defined by our feelings as much as by anything else. That's why most teaching on faith tends to focus on eradication all fear, doubt, and negative thoughts [this is the thrust of Vincent Norman Peale's work]. It's also why "You gotta have faith" has come to mean "Think positively." . . .

On the other hand, the word *belief* usually conjures up an image of intellectual assent. We say we believe in something as long as we think that it's probably true. And since our beliefs are thought to exist primarily between our ears, we're not particularly puzzled when people claim to believe in something – say UFO's, Bigfoot, Darwinian evolution, creationism, even Jesus—but live as if they don't. For most of us, beliefs are intellectual. Acting up them is optional. . . .

In contrast to our use of faith and belief, when we use the word *trust* it almost always carries an assumption that there will be some sort of corresponding action. . . . For instance, if the parent of a teenage girl says, "I trust you," but won't let her out of the house, we'd think that parent was talking nonsense. . . .

Clearly, each of these three words carries a distinctly different meaning in the English language. But . . . almost every time we find one of these three words in our English New Testaments, each is a translation of the exact same Greek root word. . . . Biblically, they not only overlap, but they are practically synonymous. . . . The kinds of faith the Bible advocates and God wants from us has far more to do with our **actions** than our feelings. In fact, biblical faith is so closely tied to actions of obedience that the Bible ridicules the very idea of someone claiming to have faith without acting upon it. (pp. 11-12) [see [James 1:22-27](#)] The Bible defines faith as trusting enough to obey. **Are we?**

### How faith sometimes makes things worse

[Hebrews 11](#) starts great, and then turns ugly at the end. Look at [Hebrews 11:35b-40](#): **Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins [they were put on wet and allowed to dry in the sun—forcing an asphyxiating death], being destitute, afflicted, tormented— 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.**

'The others' did not give up on God because He did not end their lives their way. Sometimes God rescues people who are on the brink of death or miraculously heals people or straightens out the hard stuff in a person's life and it all works out the way they wanted it to. However, those are the exceptions and not the rule as [Hebrews 11](#) shows. **Question: Are you OK with God if He chooses to end your life like those in [Hebrews 11:35b-40](#)?**

### The one thing faith can always fix

Faith may cause more earthly problems, but faith in God will always **connect** us to God. **John 1:12-13: But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**

Osborne: It may lead us to victory. It may lead us to prison. Which it will be is His call—not ours. (p. 14)

### What a geographical moron and a GPS have in common with a life of faith

Osborne: Biblical faith gives us something that all the positive thinking and visualization in the world can't provide. It gives us a life map, something we can depend on to always take us exactly where God wants us to go. . . . In many ways the adventure of learning to live by biblical faith is a lot like my love/hate relationship with the mapping software on my GPS unit. (p. 16)

Osborne: When rightly understood and applied, it doesn't matter how many doubts we have. It doesn't even matter if we're convinced that all is lost. Ultimately all that matters is whether we have enough faith (maybe just a mustard seed's worth) to **follow** God's instructions. (p. 18)

Read the New Testament and see whom Jesus commended for their faith: it was always those who were acting on their faith:

- In **Mark 2**, Jesus saw the paralytic man's friends' faith. They were taking the roof off at the time. Faith is active.
- In **Matthew 8**, Jesus healed a centurion's son because the centurion acted on his faith and pursued Jesus. Faith is active.

Osborne: Those who do, get where they're supposed to go. Those who don't, end up lost somewhere far from home. . . . Faith is not a skill we master. It's not an impenetrable shield that protects us from life's hardships and trials. It's not a magic potion that removes every mess. It's a map we follow. It's designed to guide us on a path called righteousness. Along the way, it doesn't promise to fix every flat tire. It won't reroute us around every traffic jam. It won't even stop the road rage of the crazy guy we cut off at the merge. But it will take us exactly where God wants us to go. And isn't that where we want to be? (pp. 18-19)

## Homework

Osborne: Read the story of Peter's release from prison in **Acts 12:1-19**. Write down every element of surprise or doubt you can find in the story. . . . Now write down everything that shows faithful obedience despite any doubt. (pp. 179-180) **Which list is longer?**

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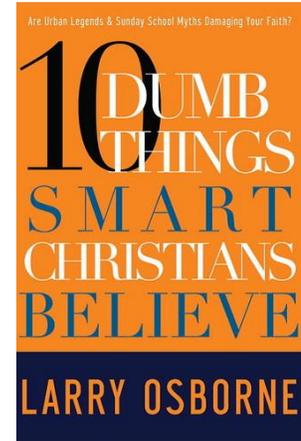
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## Introduction

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## Dumb Thing #2: Forgiving Means Forgetting

### Four goofy ideas about forgiveness & The myth of a forgetful God

Read pages 21-23

Does God forgive sin? **Yes**

**Psalm 103:12:** As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

**Micah 7:19:** He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea.

**Jeremiah 31:34c:** For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. (Example: Jim listening to music while studying)

### Two real realms of forgiveness

**Osborne:** When it comes to forgiveness, there are two realms: the spiritual and eternal arena and the earthly and temporal arena. God's forgiveness shows up a bit differently in each one.

In the spiritual and eternal realm, forgiveness wipes the slate clean. While God doesn't forget what we've done, he treats us as if it never happened. Spiritual and eternal consequences are completely removed. Judicially, our record is **cleared**. [This is justification—declared righteousness]

But on the earthly level, things are different. God's forgiveness seldom if ever removes all the consequences or restores all that we've broken. Instead, it offers a **second** chance. (p. 27) (Example: nails in the door and bringing a magnifying glass or wood putty)

### The strange math of score keeping—why it is nearly always inaccurate

**Matthew 18:21-22:** Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

**Luke 17:3-4:** Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." [Theory versus application gets very difficult here]

### Rebuke When Wronged, Forgive When Asked

Osborne: But what happens if the person who wrongs us doesn't want to be forgiven? (p. 32)

What was Jesus' response to those that were ignorant? **Luke 23:34a: Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."**

What did Jesus say to do when believers sin against believers? **Luke 17:3: Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.**

Osborne: In other words, there is a time and place for confrontation, rebuke, and pointing out our displeasure at what is being done. God's call to forgive doesn't mean we have to go through life as a **punching** bag. It doesn't mean we can't speak up. It doesn't mean rolling over. (p. 33)

Note about physical abuse in the home

### The Trust Issue

Osborne: Does forgiveness mean restoring a broken relationship to its original state? . . . Trust, close relationships, and forgiveness are not necessarily related. While forgiveness puts aside all bitterness and all plans for revenge, it doesn't make someone trustworthy or turn the person back into our best friend. Trust has to be earned. (pp. 34-35)

### The prayer of permission

Osborne: Forgiving remains an incredibly tough thing to do. It doesn't come easy or naturally. Ultimately, it's a supernatural act motivated and empowered from the inside out. (p. 36)

So what do you do when you don't want to forgive? Osborne: I . . . give God permission to change the way I **feel**, to make me want to forgive. (p. 37)

### Why you might want to take a sin walk—and how God will meet you there

Osborne: I mean a literal walk in the neighborhood . . . during which I do my best to remember all my sins I can recall. And I mean *all*. . . . It usually exposes my "righteous anger" as not being so righteous at all. It's humbling. It renews my awe and gratitude for the incredible grace and forgiveness I've received. (p. 37)

### Becoming Like Jesus

Osborne: When we offer forgiveness to those who have no excuse—and for things most of the world would consider unforgiveable—we become most like Jesus. Remember, he died for sins he never committed to forgive people who had no right to be forgiven.

Maybe that's why it's such a big deal to him that we learn to forgive as we've been forgiven. (p. 38)

Let's hand out wood putty and not magnifying glasses.

Now we switch gears to the third dumb thing.

## Dumb Thing #3: A Godly Home Guarantees Godly Kids

### Where'd We Get That Idea?

**Proverbs 22:6**

### What We Think It Says

**Osborne: A child raised *correctly* will come **back** to the Lord *eventually* (p. 41)**

### What It Actually Says

**Proverbs 22:6: Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.**

**Proverbs 22:6: Train up** [an imperative meaning to dedicate, inaugurate, train—this word is used four other times in three other Scriptures and is always translated, ‘dedicate’; the idea behind the word is that this is a **dedication** to a narrow way of use] **a child** [used in the Old Testament of humans from newborns to age twenty] **in the way** [journey, direction, manner, habit] **he should go** [literally, mouth; used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to how much someone could comfortably put in their mouths], **And when he is old** [first used in the Bible of Sarah when she was mocking Abraham regarding her own old age] **he will not depart** [turn **aside**, depart, avoid, end] **from it.**

Osborne’s take on the “**the way he should go**”: **Some see it as a reference to training in the path of righteousness. Others claim the Hebrew phrase is better interpreted as referring to training that aligns with a child’s unique personality and giftedness. . . . In the long run, I’m not sure it matters. Both concepts are important and find support elsewhere in Scripture. Christian parents need to teach their children the pathway of righteousness and do it in a way that best fits the unique personality and gifts of the child. (p. 43)**

Jim’s translation: Dedicate a boy towards the natural/comfortable habits for him, and when he is old, he will probably not stop doing them.

If this proverb teaches anything, it teaches that a child will not turn away—it does not teach that a child can grow up to live like a pagan and eventually come back to God regardless of what happens.

### The Forgotten Distinction

**Osborne: This is a proverb, not a promise. . . . a proverb is different. It’s an observation about how life generally works. It tells us what **usually** happens, not what always happens. . . . The book of Proverbs is called Proverbs for good reason. It’s comprised of God-breathed observations about life. But the observations are far from universal. The righteous aren’t always honored. The wicked sometimes succeed. The diligent can lose it all, and the lazy can strike it rich. The same goes for Solomon’s encouraging words about children who are properly raised. It’s a proverb, not a promise. Not many will depart . . . But some will. (pp. 41-42)**

### Why This Is Such A Devastating Myth

It produces two different sides of the same error (misplaced **optimism** and needless **guilt**)

**Osborne: The flip side of unwarranted guilt is foolish pride. It's something I've found to be particularly prevalent among those of us who buy into the myth that good and godly homes always produce good and godly kids and just so happen to have children who are naturally compliant, easygoing, or academically gifted. . . . It's not hard to see why we like to take the credit. When anything turns out well, we'd all prefer to think we had something to do with it. (p. 47)**

### What The Bible Actually Says

Rebellion happens even in the **best** of environments (**Genesis 1-3**) (examine our environments: good?)

Everyone is responsible for his or her **own** actions (**Ezekiel 18:1-32**) (we will be held accountable for how we reared our children—not for how they turned out). **Osborne: None of us can hide behind our upbringing or environment as an excuse for our wrong decisions or foolish behavior. (p. 46)**

We can have lots of influence—we do not have any **power** (**Proverbs 21:30-31**)

There are no **guarantees** (**2 Chronicles 10-21**)

- |                   |                 |               |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Rehoboam (bad) | 2. Abijah (bad) | 3. Asa (good) | 4. Jehoshaphat (good) |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------|

**Osborne: Parents . . . have responsibility for how they raise their children. . . . Passing the . . . torch should be a top concern for every Christian parent. Nothing says that more than the requirement that those who offer leadership in the church must first have their household in order. (p. 51)**

**Admittedly, there are plenty of Christian parents who have good reason to feel guilty. Hypocrisy, angry outbursts, inattention (or its mirror opposite, hyper control), poor marriages, and broken homes are all too common. The price for each is always high. . . . But when godly parents do the best they can and yet fail to achieve the outcome they hope for, they need a break, not a drive-by "guilting". And when things go well, we need a lot more gratitude and a lot less pride. So, if you're a parent, give it your best shot—then go take a nap. And if you've already given it your best shot—take a long nap.(p. 53)**

## Homework

### To make it easier for your kids to know God . . .

Be working on having a great marriage

Be modeling what you hope to get

Be adapting to their unique bent

### To make it harder for your kids to know God . . .

Be hands-off when they sin (**1 Samuel 2:22-25 & 3:12-13**)

Be unreasonably strict (**Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21**)

Be overly righteous (**Ecclesiastes 7:16**)

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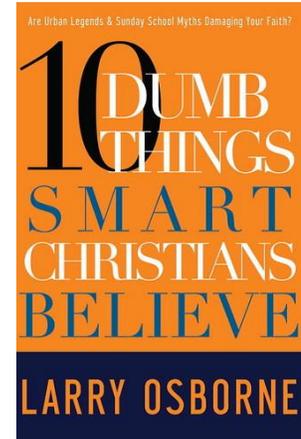
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## Dumb Thing #4: God Has a Blueprint for My Life

**Osborne:** Have you noticed that when it comes time to make a major decision, most of us experience a heightened interest in discovering God's will? Not that we don't care the rest of the time. . . . Some of us look for signs, divine coincidences, and open doors that supposedly indicate God's leading. Others look deep within, seeking a supernatural insight or a sense of inner peace to show the way. . . . Some of us major on fact finding and wise counsel or at least the advice of a few friends. Almost all of us pray a little more: *Lord, show me your will—please.* (p. 55)

Easter egg

**Osborne:** The idea of a detailed blueprint for our life is a myth. It confuses God's omniscience with his divine will. No question, God knows everything, down to the number of hairs on our head. But that doesn't mean he has a plan for how many we have or that we're in rebellion if we try to replace some of the ones that go missing. The fact is, God doesn't have a blueprint for our life. Never has. Never will. He does, however, have a game plan for our life. And the difference is important. (p. 57)

## Blueprints

Blueprints **must** be followed. If they're not followed, the house doesn't pass inspection, you'll have a door where a window should be, or the toilet won't flush.

**Osborne:** You don't mess with blueprints. You follow them. For many of us, this is our metaphor of God's will. (p. 57)

The metaphors that we use are important. Here are some big names that have preached sermons or written books with the "God has a blueprint for my life" title: Ravi Zacharias, Andy Stanley, Robert Morris, and many, many more. Jesus was a master at metaphors. It is one of the reasons He is still easy to understand. But there is a better metaphor for God's will for our lives.

## Game Plans

**Osborne:** A game plan is very different. Rather than spelling out everything in detail, it sets forth general guidelines and principles, with lots of **freedom** and flexibility for adjustments as the game unfolds. (p. 58)

## Are You Sure You Want a Blueprint?

The more you think about it, the less you really want a blueprint. If we are just following a blueprint with every item perfectly scripted, we are robots with no free will.

What happens when someone doesn't follow the blueprint? Does that impact someone else's blueprint?

**Osborne:** This is not to say that God *never* has a specific and highly detailed plan in mind. Sometimes he does. He told Hosea to marry Gomer. He told Moses and the children of Israel exactly where to camp and when to move during their wanderings in the wilderness. . . . But these kinds of explicit instructions are exceptions, not the norm—even in the lives of our biblical heroes. The fact is, we have

much greater freedom than any blueprint would allow. That's the main reason the details of God's will sometimes seem hard to find. They often aren't there. We're asking God, "Which one?" And he's saying, "I don't care. It's up to you." In the vast majority of situations and decisions, we have great latitude. God doesn't care where we work so much as **how** we work, where we live so much as **how** we live, and even whom we marry (as long as it's within the faith) so much as **how** we do marriage. (pp. 59-60)

## More Downsides

### Paralyzed by Fear

This is me. I am a beaver and beavers love data. We can collect data until the cows come home to guarantee that we are making the right decision. Tell the story of my recent move from one position to another and getting advice and making a decision the same day. I talked to my wife, a few trusted business friends, and a few mentors. Many times, I will not act because I do not feel like I have enough data to make the 'right' decision. The reality is that leadership requires decisions in the face of not enough data. As one of my mentors said one time, "There's never enough time, there's never enough money, and there's never enough data."

**Osborne: In the mistaken belief that there is only one right choice for every major area of life, [a blueprint mentality] paralyzes decision making. As a result, we can end up hesitating, over-thinking, and rejecting lots of good and acceptable options. . . . If the Scriptures tell us what to do, then by all means let's do it—and do it right now. But if not, let's make the best choice we can and move on. . . . And even if we do make a mistake, there is always a path of obedience in every situation—even on the back end of some really stupid decisions. (pp. 61-62)**

### Skewed Focus

**Osborne: Instead of worrying about the weightier matters of godliness—justice, mercy, and obedience—we fixate on finding the right mate, choosing the right career, or renting the right apartment. (p. 62)**

**Osborne: It's obviously unfair to paint with such a broad brush as to imply that everyone who sees God's will as a detailed blueprint ignores God's day-to-day commands. That's clearly not the case. But a blueprint mind-set does tend to turn our focus more toward *finding* rather than **becoming**. (p. 63)**

## Homework: Obey What We Know

**Osborne: It's hard for an athlete to follow a game plan if he misses all the team meetings. (p. 67)**

Here are some verses to get you started: [Ephesians 5:17; 2:3](#); [1 Peter 4:3-4](#); [Matthew 18:14](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#); [5:18](#); [1 Peter 2:15](#); [4:19](#); [Revelation 4:11](#); [John 6:39](#); [John 6:40](#); [Hebrews 10:10](#)

**Osborne: God, indeed, does have a plan for all of us. But it's a game plan with lots of freedom, not a blueprint with every detail spelled out. Our job is not so much to find something; it's to become someone—a reflection of his image and character no matter where we find ourselves. (p. 69)**

## Dumb Thing #5: Christians Shouldn't Judge

Osborne: I have a surefire way to get your non-Christian friends or coworkers to quote the Bible. It works every time. Use the **s** word. Call something a sin. Speak out against a lifestyle the Bible forbids. Critique the belief system of a cult or world religion. Or criticize any behavior that isn't universally condemned by our culture. Then step back and wait. It won't be long until someone who otherwise doesn't have much use for the Bible quotes from **Matthew 7:1**. "**Judge not**" (NKJV). Ironically, the person who speaks up will probably have no idea where to find the quoted verse—and no idea that it's quoted out of context. (p. 71)

Has anyone ever had someone quote **Matthew 7:1** to you? (**Judge not**)

### The Judging Myth

Osborne: Jesus didn't say, "**Judge not**," followed by a period or an exclamation point. He said, "**Do not judge**," followed by a clarification of what type of judgments to make, when to make them, and how to make them. (p. 72)

Using "**judge not**" on its own is called proof texting: basing a belief off a small portion of Bible.

Osborne: The **Matthew 7** passage, read in context, isn't a prohibition against judging. It's a stern warning against judging improperly. In fact, immediately after saying "**Judge not**," Jesus goes on to tell us not to give our sacred things to dogs or to cast our pearls before swine. That's hard to do without making a few judgments, especially . . . figuring out who is a "dog" and who is a "swine." (p. 72)

### What about Tolerance?

Unfortunately, most people feel that telling the truth is not tolerant. The sad fact is that tolerance has changed definitions over the years. Tolerance once meant allowing someone else to be wrong. Today, tolerance means that **everyone is right, no matter what they believe or what they do** (Osborne, p. 73).

### The Truth About Spiritual Truth

The reality is that there is such a thing as spiritual **truth**. While many disagree, here's an example that Osborne uses to show the folly in a different view: Osborne: **Imagine an engineering student arguing that his calculations don't matter as long as they work for him. Not many of us would drive over a bridge he designed. Or imagine your doctor giving you a handful of pills and telling you to take whichever ones "feel right."** (p. 74)

There is truth in the world and it is critical that we know it, live it, and share it.

### Why We Need to Judge

If we live in a world with no judging, we would never evaluate **reality** against the truth of the scriptures.

Osborne: **The proper course of action is not to stop judging others; it's to judge properly, in line with the standards and principles of judgment that Jesus taught.** (p. 76)

## Judge as We Want to Be Judged

The first hurdle to clear before judging is to understand **Matthew 7:2: For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.**

**Osborne: Judge with extreme caution and clarity. (p. 76)**

## Deal with Our Own Stuff First

The next hurdle is to understand **Matthew 7:3-5: 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.**

One goal of our judgment should always **restoration**

## Don't Judge If God Hasn't Spoken Clearly

Closed hand vs open fist

Many things that we think really matter probably do not matter much at all. **Osborne: I learned long ago that anything left out of the Bible was not left out by mistake. (p. 81)**

## Christians and Non-Christians

Is there a difference in how we engage in judging Christians vs. non-Christians? **Yes**

**Osborne: Even if we successfully convince non-Christians to live by Christian standards (or successfully legislate it), without bringing people into relationship with Christ, all we've done is populate hell with nicer and more moral people. More important, the Bible specifically forbids us to judge non-Christians by Christian standards. (p. 82)**

**1 Corinthians 5:9-13: 9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet I certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.**

**12 For what *have* I *to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."**

## What is the Goal?

### Spiritual Leaders

**Osborne: When it comes to spiritual leaders (either self-proclaimed or widely acclaimed), the purpose of our judging is to evaluate and protect. (p. 84)** There are sheep in wolves' clothing and we must identify them.

## Fellow Christians

One goal of our judgment should always **restoration**

## Non-Christians

**Nothing goes here**

## Judging with Grace

Osborne: Finally, we must judge with grace. When our judgments lead us into personal attacks, bitterness, or raging anger, something has gone terribly wrong. (p. 85)

Osborne: When it comes to judging them or anyone, God wants us to judge in the same way we both judge and love ourselves—boldly calling sin, sin, while responding with an abundance of grace and mercy. It's a myth that Christians shouldn't judge. We can and should. We just need to make sure we are judging the right things in the right way.

A proper understanding of when and how to judge is an important step toward spiritual maturity. Without it, we can end up at either one of two dangerous extremes: winking at sin in the mistaken belief that we have no right to judge the beliefs and actions of others or unintentionally condemning ourselves with our harsh denunciations of the very things we struggle with—or God could care less about. (p. 86)

## Homework: The Hurdles to Clear

Matthew 7; Galatians 1:6-9; 6:1; 1 John 2:3-5; 4:1-3; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 6:18-20; Romans 14:1-15:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15; 2 Timothy 2:23-26

# Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe

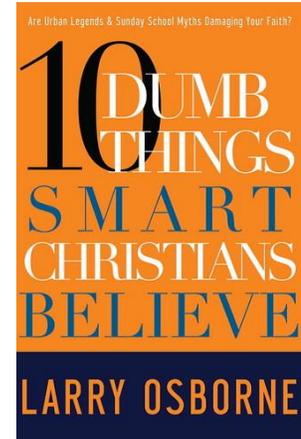
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## Introduction

Tonight we continue our series on Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe. Tonight, we look at the next two dumb ideas: Everything Happens for a Reason and Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide.

Tonight and next week here at the Hixson Campus we are going to test some statements that you might have heard (even in church) related to Christian beliefs.

Let me read you an extended excerpt from the book that I am borrowing from for this series—*10 Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe*: (and feel free to get a copy of it and read along as we go through it):



**Osborne: Over the years, I've counseled and worked with many people who have made life-altering decisions based on what they perceived to be biblical principles, only to discover too late that what they thought was biblical didn't come from the Bible at all.**

**Most of the time, they were victims of a spiritual urban legend. A *spiritual urban legend* is just like a secular urban legend. It's a belief, story, assumption, or truism that gets passed around as fact. . . .**

**Admittedly, the consequences of some spiritual misconceptions aren't particularly devastating. . . .**

**But far too often the consequences are spiritually devastating. Think of the disillusionment that sets in when someone writes off God for failing to keep a promise that He never made. Or the despair that follows a step of faith that turns out to have been a leap onto thin ice. . . . But whatever the case, I encourage you to examine each one with an open mind and an open Bible. . . . (pp. 1-4)**

Why I picked this: (1) to encourage us to look to Scripture to **test all things** (exactly like **1 Thessalonians 5:21** commands) and (2) to remove the disillusionment that comes when we rely on promises that God **never** made.

## Tentative Schedule

**Week 1:** Introduction

(1) Faith Can Fix Anything

**Week 2:** (2) Forgiving Means Forgetting

(3) A Godly Home Guarantees Godly Kids

**Week 3:** (4) God Has a Blueprint for My Life

(5) Christians Shouldn't Judge

**Week 4:** (6) Everything Happens for a Reason

(7) Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide

**Week 5:** (8) God Brings Good Luck

(9) A Valley Means a Wrong Turn

(10) Dead People Go to a Better Place

## Dumb Thing #6: Everything Happens for a Reason

This particular dumb thing will be the one that most of us struggle with the most because it is the most prevalent in the church (from my personal experience). I felt like this picture (and the look on some of your faces looks like this too when I mention this title).



Larry Osborne tells the story at the beginning of this chapter of when his wife got cancer. He describes many, many well-meaning people coming up to him with these types of comments: **Osborne: “God must be up to something.” “God doesn’t make mistakes.” “You must be very special for God to trust you with this.” “Won’t it be great to see how God uses this?” “Isn’t it good to know that everything happens for a reason?”** In one sense they were absolutely right. No matter what happens, God is in control. He’s King of the universe. And he’s good. But that doesn’t mean he’s the direct cause of everything that happens. It doesn’t mean that everything that happens is something he wants to happen. And it certainly doesn’t mean that everything he allows is good. God did not cause Lucifer to rebel, Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, or David to sleep with Bathsheba. He did not kill Abel, build the tower of Babel, or force the crowd to cry out for Barabbas. He didn’t coerce the Roman soldiers into killing Jesus. Those who carried out these evil deeds bear full responsibility for their actions. They can’t blame God. Adam tried. It didn’t fly. You can look it up. (pp. 88-89)

## Where Did We Get This Idea Anyway?

**Romans 8:28**

## What Romans 8:28 Actually Says

**Romans 8:28:** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

Osborne: On the surface, that seems to imply that everything that happens is a part of God's greater plan, that life is like a giant jigsaw puzzle that will make sense once all the other pieces are in place. . . . It doesn't say that everything that happens is good. It simply says that God is at work in all things. . . . God can and will accomplish his good purposes no matter **what**. (p. 90)

The reality is that some **restrictions** apply. You have to be a Christian and you have to love God (which is defined elsewhere in the New Testament as being obedient).

Osborne: If we live in high-handed disobedience in some area of our life, there's no blanket promise that God will step in and fix the mess our defiance creates. (pp. 91-92)

## Don't Blame God

Osborne: Those who assume that everything that happens has God's fingerprints . . . fail to distinguish between what God allows and what God causes—what God **permits** and what God **prefers**. (p. 93)

## Self-Inflicted Wounds

Osborne: Sometimes the trials and hardships we face are the results of sinful choices. (p. 93)

## Life in a Fallen World

Osborne: Sometimes bad things happen because we live in a fallen world. To some degree, we're all caught in the backwash of Adam's sin. . . . Any attempt to downplay the universal impact of the fall—or worse, the assumption that Christians have a magic bubble of protection—fails to square with Scripture. Or with life. . . . Murphy isn't God's emissary. He's Adam's legacy. . . . When it comes to the consequences of the fall, we aren't offered immunity. We're offered **eternity**. (pp. 94-95)

## Foolish Decisions

Osborne: Sometimes we make foolish decisions—not sinful decisions, just dumb ones. . . . Our choices matter. They have consequences. Picking the wrong stock can wipe out a portfolio. Picking the wrong partner can derail your business. Picking our nose can ruin our social status. . . . It's ludicrous to blame God or to assume that he'll jump in and fix every idiotic decision we make. . . . The good news isn't that God promises to keep us from making lame decisions or to fix whatever we break. It's that he promises to continue working for our eternal good no matter how many dim-witted judgments we make along the way. (p. 95)

## Why This Is So Important

Anger at God, Glossing over Sin, Irresponsibility, and Misplaced Hope

## Can a Bad Thing Ever Be a Good Thing?

Osborne: Obviously there are situations where God takes something bad and uses it to produce something good. The ultimate example is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Another case can be found in

the misfortunes of Joseph and his subsequent rise to power in Egypt. . . . When Joseph's brothers eventually came to ask him for mercy despite their despicable act of selling him into slavery, he responded with these famous words: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." . . . Notice that Joseph didn't call his brothers' evil actions good or necessary. He didn't say that everything happens for a reason. He simply pointed out that God was at work despite their evil intents. . . . The fact is, just as it was for Joseph, it's nearly impossible for us to distinguish which of the painful events in our life result from God's orchestration, which ones he is planning to use, and which ones he'll overcome in eternity. In the meantime it doesn't really matter. Every trial or hardship calls for the same response: **obedience**. We are to do the right thing no matter what the outcome. Sometimes, as in the case of Joseph, our obedience will be rewarded in this life. Sometimes it will be rewarded in the next. (pp. 99-100)

### If God Is Going to Fix Things Someday, Why Not Now?

Osborne: God lingers because for every day he delays, more of his former enemies become his friends and family. (p. 100)

### By the Way

So, how does Osborne respond now to those folks who were well intentioned but hurtful? Just like you do when your kids bring you their well-intentioned best—you appreciate the thought and love and look past the imperfections. Be grateful that there are those around us with whom we can do life together.

## Dumb Thing #7: Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide

### Where'd We Get That Idea?



Jiminy Cricket (not even the Bible!—and he wasn't even named in the original novel, but he was appointed by the Blue Fairy in the Disney hit, *Pinocchio*, to be Pinocchio's conscience)—you remember him, he sang, *When You Wish Upon A Star* (which won the Academy Award for Best Original Song in 1940) and *Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide*. He also hosted many Disney specials.

*When You Wish Upon A Star* is a nice song, but it's filled with problems. My grandfather's philosophy on this was, "If you spit in one hand and wish in the other, see which one gets filled up quicker."

But our topic is the conscience, so here are the words to *Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide*:

**When you get in trouble and you don't know  
right from wrong**

**Give a little whistle! Give a little whistle!**

**When you meet temptation and the urge is very  
strong**

**Give a little whistle! Give a little whistle!**

**Not just a little squeak, pucker up and blow  
And if your whistle's weak, yell, "Jiminy Cricket!"**

**Take the straight and narrow path  
And if you start to slide**

**Give a little whistle! Give a little whistle!  
And always let your conscience be your guide.**

Many people hold true to this ideology—that if you put your trust in your own internal moral compass (how many people define the conscience), everything will work out just fine.

## The Myth of a Trustworthy Conscience

**Osborne: Many of us have been taught to trust our conscience as a God-given, internal indicator of right and wrong. Face with a tough dilemma, we turn to it. If we have peace about our decision or action (read that as an absence of guilt), we assume it must be okay. Otherwise, our conscience would surely have let us know something was wrong. (p. 108)**

## Thermometers and Thermostats

The conscience is not a thermometer (telling us right vs. wrong—this is black and white). It is a thermostat (telling us our **perception** of right and wrong—this is set).

**Osborne: Our conscience doesn't tell us when we're violating God's standards. It tells us when we're violating **our** standards. (p. 110)**

## Seesaw Morality

**Osborne: Our conscience is easy to reset. (p. 110)**

Over time, our conscience can change based off our knowledge (but sometimes it reverts to prior knowledge—i.e., Bible on top of other books).

**Osborne: It's far too pliable to be counted on as an absolute authority. (p. 111)**

## What does the Bible say?

**1 Corinthians 4:4 [Amplified]: I am not conscious of anything against myself, and I feel blameless; but I am not vindicated and acquitted before God on that account. It is the Lord [Himself] Who examines and judges me.**

If Paul was not okay with just having a clear conscience, should I be?

## Sin Nature and Blind Spots

The Fall corrupted everything about me. The best I can do is filthy rags (**Isaiah 64:6**). My sin nature has damaged me beyond my understanding.

I am capable of being deceived (even by myself). If you don't think so, here are a few verses that talk about our ability to be deceived:

**Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; Romans 7:11: sin . . . deceived me; 1 Corinthians 3:18: Let no one deceive himself; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 15:33, Galatians 6:7, James 1:16: Do not be deceived; Galatians 6:3: he deceives himself; Ephesians 5:6, 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 1 John 3:7: Let no one deceive you; 1 John 1:8: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves**

My capacity for being deceived overwhelmed me. I am deceived by my capacity to be deceived. Say it with me, "I know that I am self-deceived."

We can be completely saved and simultaneously thoroughly human. Paul did not trust his conscience (in [1 Corinthians 4:4](#)), so why should I trust mine?

## A Calloused Heart

I ran a lawn-mowing business in high school. One of the downsides, was the calluses. My hands would develop calluses each spring from the machinery I worked with. During the winter, they would soften up again, but each spring I would go through the painful process of building up the calluses.

Our hearts work that way as well. We can go through periods of sensitivity, callousness, and back to sensitivity. It is a painful yo-yo of emotions, but it should also teach us something about our hearts—they are deceitful and cannot be trusted ([Jeremiah 17:9](#): **The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? And the answer is?** God. That's why we have to go to Him for the answers to life.)

**Osborne: Check out any prison. You'll find that it's filled with people who let their conscience be their guide—with dire consequences. But, sadly, we can find the same thing in many churches. (p. 117)**

Your conscience can be genuinely clear because it is genuinely broken. Never let it be your guide. That's God's job through the Bible and the Holy Spirit.

## So What's It Good For?

**Osborne: When rightly understood and functioning properly, our conscience is a valuable early warning device. (p. 118)** (a great red or yellow light, but not a great green light)

**Osborne: Our conscience's ease of adjustment can also be a good thing. That means we have the ability to constantly realign it to Scripture if we so choose. The more accurately we do so, the greater our ability to recognize and avoid the deceptive lures of sin. (p. 119)**

## Homework

1. **Osborne: Read Romans 12:2 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What are you currently doing to be sure your conscience is properly calibrated? Is there anything you should start or stop doing to better align your conscience with God's heart and values? (p. 191)**
2. More verses about the conscience: [Acts 24:16](#) (Paul's desire for his conscience); [Romans 2:15](#) (the knowledge the conscience can bring); [1 Corinthians 8, 10](#) (toward being aware of others' consciences); [1 Timothy 1:5, 3:9, 2 Timothy 1:3, Hebrews 13:18](#), and [1 Peter 3:16](#) (clean conscience); [Titus 1:5](#) (defiled conscience); [Hebrews 9:14](#) (God cleaning the conscience)

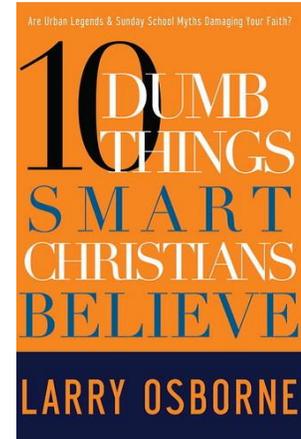
# Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe

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## Introduction

Tonight we finish our series on Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe. Tonight, we look at the last three dumb ideas: God Brings Good Luck, A Valley Means a Wrong Turn, and Dead People Go to a Better Place.

Before I go too far, let me say thank you to several people. First, to Larry Osborne for writing this book. Second, to Julie for creating space for me to study each week (don't thank me, thank her; **Lecrae: Sometimes, life's best gifts come in boxes that take a lot of work to open**). Third, to Darrell for asking me to speak. Fourth, to you for your consistency and encouragement.



Let me read you an extended excerpt from the book that I am borrowing from for this series—*10 Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe*: (feel free to get a copy):

**Osborne: Over the years, I've counseled and worked with many people who have made life-altering decisions based on what they perceived to be biblical principles, only to discover too late that what they thought was biblical didn't come from the Bible at all.**

**Most of the time, they were victims of a spiritual urban legend. A spiritual urban legend is just like a secular urban legend. It's a belief, story, assumption, or truism that gets passed around as fact. . . .**

**Admittedly, the consequences of some spiritual misconceptions aren't particularly devastating. . . .**

**But far too often the consequences are spiritually devastating. Think of the disillusionment that sets in when someone writes off God for failing to keep a promise that He never made. Or the despair that follows a step of faith that turns out to have been a leap onto thin ice. . . . But whatever the case, I encourage you to examine each one with an open mind and an open Bible. . . . (pp. 1-4)**

Why I picked this: (1) to encourage us to look to Scripture to **test all things** (exactly like **1 Thessalonians 5:21** commands) and (2) to remove the disillusionment that comes when we rely on promises that God **never** made.

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(10) Dead People Go to a Better Place

## Dumb Thing #8: God Brings Good Luck

This dumb idea is dangerous because it is so prevalent in our American churches. When in college, I took a class called Contemporary Theology. We were told to write a ten-page paper on a contemporary theology. I chose prosperity theology. Here is the first paragraph: **Only in a materialistic society plagued with greed, desire to have the best, and voracious appetites for things could theology focused on health, wealth, and success survive and prosper. Prosperity theology is such a theology, with the motto, “You can have what you say.” America is the fertile soil in which prosperity theology has thrived. No other country in the world sustains and fuels such a continuous focus on health, wealth, and success, as does America.** This garbage is prevalent because we have allowed it to be prevalent.

The prosperity theology proponents promise health and **wealth**. **Osborne: As for Jesus, he certainly never promised his followers a long run of good luck or earthly success. He promised forgiveness. He promised eternity. But winning lottery numbers, job promotions, good health, and riches? Not exactly. . . . We expect that living God’s way should cause most things to work out (read that as good fortune). We also assume that high-handed rebellion against God should cause life to fall apart. (p. 124)**

The only problem with this way of thinking is that we do not serve a quid pro quo God. Dave Barber calls this a “Do-good-get-**good**, do-bad-get-bad” theology.

**Osborne: It’s only understandable why so many of us would assume that being on God’s side should bring good luck and success. It just makes sense. . . . For most of us, it’s hard to fathom why God would sit back and allow the wicked to prosper while they mock him and hassle his people. We wouldn’t allow it if we were God. So, why would he? (pp. 125-126)**

**What is the first story in the Bible after the fall?** Cain and Abel. It is a story about a man who does not get the death penalty for murder. **Osborne: It’s as if God is trying to tell us right off the bat that in a fallen world lots of things won’t go as we’d hope or expect. In the same vein, Jesus knew what he was doing when he warned us to count the cost before stepping out to follow him. Sure, the rewards are incredible and the downside of rejecting him terrifying. But in the short run, being on his team is not always what it’s cracked up to be. He knew our fickle tendencies. He knew how quickly we accept the good things (and praise him for them) and how quickly we can turn on him when things go wrong (which is what made Job such a rare and righteous man). (p. 126)**

### Eddie Haskell Christians

According to Osborne, this type of theology **creates a form of cultural Christianity filled with rituals, symbols, and rules that everyone abides by but no one believes. Ultimately, it plays God for a fool. It’s Eddie Haskell Christianity. (p. 127)**

**Osborne: Rather than giving us a little bit of luck in exchange for a little bit of obedience, God is much more likely to do something else—spit us out. . . . The thing we have to remember is that the benefits of righteousness aren’t primarily found in earthly rewards. They’re found in the next life. The great**

benefit is forgiveness. The great reward is heaven. Everything else is merely . . . a small appetizer before the great feast. To measure the glory of the king's table by the finger food (or absence of finger food) would be silly. Same for measuring God's goodness and rewards by yesterday's fender bender or even today's tragic medical diagnosis. (pp. 128-129)

### True Words, Wrong Message

Sometimes this theology seeps into the way in which we tell people about Christ.

Osborne: In our zeal to see people come to Christ, we often paint a picture of a wonderful and abundant Christian life that effectively ignores, downplays, and even negates the harder teachings of Jesus. While that might speed along so-called decisions for Christ, it does little to prepare a fledgling disciple for what's ahead. In fact, it does the opposite. It sets the stage for disillusionment when things don't turn out so well. (p. 131)

If we are honest about our **issues**, people will see how great a savior that Jesus is.

### Good News or Bad News?

Osborne: Christianity is not a religion of gloom. Properly understood, it's a faith filled with hope and joy. The fact is, righteous living often does bring great rewards in this life. As Solomon so forcefully points out in the book of Proverbs, righteousness *generally* brings stellar results. But as we saw in an earlier chapter, his proverbs aren't God's promises. They are God-inspired statements about how life *generally* works. So, while righteous living may *generally* bring stellar results, it doesn't always. There is **no** guarantee. (p. 132)

Osborne: That's why unrealistic and unfounded spiritual expectations need to be exposed for what they are: wishful thinking. Truth isn't always what we want to hear or would like to believe. But it is truth. Everything else is a mirage. These mirage-type truths might give us hope for the day. They might spur us to keep on going. But eventually they will come up empty. And when they do, they always make things worse, not better. (pp. 132-133)

## Homework

1. Osborne: Read **Psalm 73**. Have you ever felt the same kind of confusion that Asaph felt? If so, what caused it? Did anything happen to put things in proper perspective? (p. 192)
2. Osborne: Here are some passages that suggest following God doesn't always bring such good luck. Read each one and jot down your observations. **Job 1-2, Proverbs 11:8, Proverbs 24:15-16, Mark 13:13, Luke 9:22-23, Ephesians 1:17-21** (p. 193)

You should see a theme with each of these dumb things. Take everything and test it against the truth of Scripture. Rick Warren: **God is not who you think he is. God is who he says he is.** There are no guarantees for an easy life—stop making that your goal. John Piper: **Live dangerously for the one who loved you and died for you in his thirties. Don't throw your life away on the American dream of retirement.**

## Dumb Thing #9: A Valley Means a Wrong Turn

**Have you ever been in a valley?** They are not fun. Many times, we learn to trust God. Many times, we throw rocks at God. Some people even leave God in a valley.

Osborne on his friends' assessment of him: A long-term valley could never be a part of God's long-term plan. I'm not talking here about the kinds of valleys and trials that are completely out of our control—the medical issues, tragedies, and injustices that we can do nothing about except suck it up, trust God, and endure. I'm talking about the kinds of valleys we can avoid or wiggle out of if we so choose. . . . [My friends] assumed that God's leading always takes us to the mountaintop. They realized there would be an occasional hardship along the way. But they believed it would always be incidental, a short but necessary part of the process. Faced with a lingering valley, especially one with no apparent end in sight, they automatically assumed it meant a wrong turn. They were sure it should be gotten out of as soon as possible, no matter what it took to do so. . . . Those who buy into this myth and live by it end up paying a high price. Important spiritual lessons go wanting. Godly character is stunted. The myth excuses and even encourages self-centered decisions in the name of getting out of the pain as quickly as possible. It even truncates God's power. If we run from every messy situation on the assumption that God can't be in it, we'll never experience the miraculous power of his deliverance. After all, a miracle needs a **mess**. Always has. Always will. It's part of the equation. Tough trials and help-me-Jesus experiences aren't always a lot of fun. But without them, there's not much need for God to show up. It's also a belief that hurts others. If we assume that long-term pain and hardship are totally unacceptable and automatically outside God's will, then whatever harm or heartbreak we may cause others in our haste to get out becomes mere collateral damage—an unfortunate but unavoidable part of our quest for happiness. Think of the guilt-free ease with which our culture breaks promises. Disappointing family, friends, or business associates is no big deal if a commitment we made ends up being far costlier than we had imagined. We assume that everyone will understand. After all, we didn't know what we were getting into. And if they don't understand...well, we've gotta do what we've gotta do. So we break our word—or hire a good lawyer to find us a technicality that will let us out. Consider the countless marriage vows broken on the assumption that staying in an unhappy or unfulfilling marriage can't be God's will. "For better or worse" has somehow become "Until I can't take it anymore." So when things get tough, we move on, convinced that God will understand—and approve. Here's the kicker. Most of us understand that hardships (even long-term hardships) are a natural part of life. We know theoretically that God uses them to train and equip us, to build character, and to sometimes carry out his will. That's Christianity 101. But something fundamentally changes when the deep and lengthy valley is **our** valley. The truths we so easily accept in theory and so quickly apply to others become difficult to fathom in our own life. Let's admit it: it's pretty hard to imagine any scenario in which an all-knowing and all-loving God would want *us* to endure a lengthy season of frustration and disappointment. That's why, when we find ourselves (or those we love) mired in an extended painful valley, we tend to immediately start looking for the quickest way out. We assume something must have gone terribly wrong. (pp. 139-142)

Steven Furtick: Just because you failed doesn't mean it didn't work

## So What Does a Valley Mean?

Osborne says to ask three questions: **Why am I here? How should I respond? What can I learn?** (p. 142)

Why am I here?	How should I respond?	What can I learn?	
God sent me (p. 143)			
I messed up (p. 144)			
Beyond my understanding (p. 147)			

Osborne: Once we know what kind of valley we're in (even if it's a valley that makes no sense), it's time to answer the second question. (p. 147)

Why am I here?	How should I respond?	What can I learn?	
God sent me (p. 143)	Hang tough and refuse shortcuts		
I messed up (p. 144)	Change directions		
Beyond my understanding (p. 147)	Faith and obedience		

Once we know how to respond, then we can focus on what we can learn.

Why am I here?	How should I respond?	What can I learn?	
God sent me (p. 143)	Hang tough and refuse shortcuts	God has a plan	
I messed up (p. 144)	Change directions	Don't go there again	
Beyond my understanding (p. 147)	Faith and obedience	God has a plan	

Let's look at some examples of each:

Why am I here?	How should I respond?	What can I learn?	Examples
God sent me (p. 143)	Hang tough and refuse shortcuts	God has a plan	Joseph in Egypt and Jesus' disciples in the boat, Daniel
I messed up (p. 144)	Change directions	Don't go there again	Israel's cycles of subjugation (p. 145), David, Jonah
Beyond my understanding (p. 147)	Faith and obedience	God has a plan	Job, Judges 1:19

Osborne: Never judge the appropriateness of obedience by the short-term or even lifelong results. (p. 149)

## Homework

Read [Exodus 14:1-31](#), [2 Samuel 11:1-12:20](#), [Proverbs 19:3](#), and [Judges 10:10-16](#). What kind of valley was each?

## Dumb Thing #10: Dead People Go to a Better Place

Have you ever been to a funeral where you thought the deceased was in hell? Did anyone say that?

Osborne: But there is one step that is a step too far. It's the point at which I cringe and bite my lip if I'm in the crowd. It's the point at which I refuse to participate if I'm the guy up front officiating. It's when wicked Uncle Ernie is described as being in a better place. He's not. Jesus and the Bible are quite clear—the wicked don't go to a better place. There's a real hell. It's not the devil's playground. It's not a perpetual wild party. It's Satan's worst nightmare. (p. 156)

### Wishful Thinking

Osborne: To our modern-day sensibilities, the exclusivity of Christ, the reality of hell, and the need for a salvation that includes personal piety have all become passé, if not downright offensive. And it's not just our culture that rejects these ideas; so do many Christians. The widespread denial of any sort of actual judgment or a place called hell is nowhere more evident than when we deal with death. It's here that it becomes obvious that funeral assurances are much more than a social custom. For many if not most folks, they're a deeply held, core belief. (p. 157)

Osborne: Eternal destiny isn't determined by where we **wish** people would go. It's not determined by where everyone says they went. (p. 159)

### The Myth Behind the Myth

Osborne: It's the belief-that-shall-not-be-named the conviction that all roads eventually lead to the same place despite what Jesus may have said. (pp. 160-161)

### Why is this so important?

Osborne: The cross and salvation are central to the gospel. Once we lose any real concept of hell, the natural consequence is more than just putting us at odds with Scripture; it eventually devalues the cross, redefines salvation, and turns obedience into an extra-credit spiritual add-on. (p. 163)

### Whatever Happened to Evangelism?

Osborne: One of the worst side effects is what this myth does to evangelism. (p. 163)

- A loss of **urgency** (They'll go to heaven anyway.)
- A fear of coming off as arrogant (Who are we to say Jesus is the only way?)
- A secondary **priority** (Physical and justice needs come first.) (p. 196)

Osborne: When conversion becomes unnecessary . . . then digging wells, eradicating disease, and protecting the environment obviously take precedence. . . . It's not long until compassion and liberation are no longer viewed as the essential other side of the evangelism coin; they become the only side of the coin that matters. (p. 165) **Nothing goes here**

## Homework

Read [Matthew 7:13-14](#), [10:28](#), [18:9](#), [23:15](#); [Mark 8:36](#); [John 14:6](#), [15](#), [15:10](#); [Galatians 2:21](#), [5:19-21](#), [6:7-9](#); [Acts 4:12](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:6-9](#); and [Revelation 20:10-15](#)