



**Stories of the Lord's Faithfulness:
Guidance, Healing, Provision, Protection, Presence during suffering, Deliverance.**
(Revision 7/31/00)

I. INTRODUCTION:

My (Karl's) personal struggle with suffering: In my personal spiritual journey, one of the most difficult and longest standing challenges has been to hold onto faith during times of suffering - to "be thankful in all things" - to believe that "all things work together for good for those that love the Lord". When everything was going well it was much easier for me to believe in the Lord's presence, goodness, power, and love. However, when I was physically sick and in pain, when I was an exhausted medical student without funds and my house and car were burglarized, when a child died in front of me in the emergency room, when my cousin was killed in a car wreck, or when a young father died of cancer even though hundreds in our church and elsewhere were praying, I would feel that God was uncaring, unable to help, and/or absent. When things went wrong I would become discouraged and even depressed. I would feel that God had abandoned me and become anxious that I would not be taken care of. My work as a physician and psychiatrist has also contributed to this faith struggle. During assignments on cancer units and on long term wards at several state hospitals I saw especially terrible brokenness and suffering. Some of the stories are so heavy I don't even want to write them down. In my current private practice I still see a lot of suffering every day. When I am working with people who have been suffering for years and who continue to suffer in spite of everything I have done so far (including months or even years of earnest and regular prayer), I fight a daily battle against anxiety, discouragement, and disappointment with God. At these times when brokenness, suffering, and evil are so apparent, it is a struggle to maintain faith in a loving, present, and powerful God.

One component of addressing this problem is to wrestle with the questions theologically, philosophically, and intellectually. One can work to find "answers" or "explanations" that makes sense. I am happy to share my personal notes (about 20 pages) from 10-15 years of wrestling with this question if you are interested. There are also a number of excellent books that address this question theologically and philosophically: *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis; *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis; *A Grace Disguised*, Sittser; *Making Sense Out of Suffering*, Kreeft; *Where is God When it Hurts?*, Yancey; *Disappointment With God*, Yancey.

A second component of fighting this battle is to build our trust in the Lord to the place where we can say "we have so much evidence of the Lord's power, goodness, and presence that we can trust him even though we don't have a complete answer to this painful and troubling question". We can come to a place where the foundation for our faith in God's goodness is bigger than any unanswered part of our questions about suffering.

An important part of building my faith foundation has been to read a steady diet of true stories of the Lord's faithfulness. When I was doing temporary assignments at state hospitals, I would always take books of true stories with me, and would usually read 50-100 pages each night when I returned to my motel room. I could feel the balance of discouragement shifting back to faith/hope/trust as I disciplined myself to give equal time to evidence of God's goodness. When I saw brokenness and suffering all day, I needed to take time in the evenings to give equal air time to encouraging data. I still don't understand why the Lord lets bad things happen in some situations. However, remembering & thinking about the many stories of the Lord's observable

interventions helps build my faith that the Lord is loving, present, and caring for us even when I can't see Him or His plan. The stories of the Lord's observable faithfulness help build my faith to the place where I can trust in his care and presence even when I encounter tragedy and suffering.

Many people doubt the truth of stories involving any component of supernatural intervention. It is much easier to doubt stories told by someone you have never met about someone else you don't know. When the stories occur a long time ago in some country far, far away, doubt is even easier. This tendency towards skepticism was certainly a part of my own faith journey. Hearing stories from people I knew and trusted, stories about people I knew, stories that I could check, helped me grow in the belief that the Lord is real, present, loving, and that He will care for us.

In light of understandable skepticism, I thought it would be helpful to compile a collection of stories told by people I know personally. All of the experiences described below are from my own life or were told to me by someone I know personally. When I was 19 or 20, I started keeping detailed written accounts of experiences in my own life that I thought were observable examples of the Lord's provision, protection, answers to prayer, etc. I have found these stories to be especially helpful. Since they happened to me, I know for sure that they are true and they bring back memories of the Lord's care in my own life. A number of years ago (1995), it occurred to me that the experiences of my family and friends could provide a similar source of powerfully encouraging and faith building stories. I was already aware of a few stories, but I guessed that there were many more (it was hard for me to believe that I was the only one the Lord was taking such good care of). As I began to investigate, I discovered exactly what I had expected - a large number of true stories that I had previously been unaware of.

Most of these people are family members, close friends, or members of our church. Most of them would probably be willing to speak with you on the phone to discuss details &/or answer questions. Hopefully these stories of the Lord's observable protection, guidance, encouragement, answers to prayer,...etc. will help build your faith. My prayer is that you will grow to the place where you will be able to trust in His presence, love, and care even when you cannot yet see His plan or feel His presence in the midst of whatever suffering you are facing.

“Theophostic” Addendum: A third component in dealing with “the problem of suffering” is to find and resolve the wounds and lies that undermine our faith in the Lord's power, goodness, and presence. Since 1998 I have been applying Theophostic principles to my thoughts and emotions regarding suffering, and I have discovered that a large part of the negative thoughts and emotions that I used to experience when “bad” things happened were “triggered” thoughts and emotions - thoughts and emotions from old wounds and lies about being disappointed, left on my own without adequate help, etc. As the Lord has healed these old wounds and spoken truth to the lies attached to them, it has become easier and easier for me to hold onto the truth that the Lord is good, powerful, and present, even when bad things happen. I still think it is Biblical to remember and share examples of the Lord's faithfulness, I still enjoy reading true stories of the Lord's faithfulness, but I don't need to use them as a coping tool to help manage triggered thoughts and emotions - I don't feel like I will crash and burn into anxiety, discouragement, and depression if I don't read them constantly.

Biblical precedent: The old testament frequently describes instructions like the following: "and the Lord said 'pile up stones to remind yourselves and your descendants of my faithfulness at this place'; 'this time each year, have a special meal. When your children ask 'why are we doing this' tell them about my deeds in delivering you' (Ex 13); 'remember all the things I have done for you - bringing you out of Egypt, feeding you in the wilderness,...etc.'" A prominent biblical principle is to make sure we remember what the Lord has done for us (write down, tell your children,

make memorial stones, have memorial feasts,...etc).

Ex 13:7-10, 14 “Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen in your possession, and no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory. You shall tell your child on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of the LORD may be on your lips; for with a strong hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt. You shall keep this ordinance at its proper time from year to year....When in the future your child asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall answer, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.

Deut , 4:9 “But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children”

1 Chron 16:8-12, 23 & 24. “O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his presence continually. Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,...Sing to the LORD, all the earth. Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.”

Psalm 78:1-4 “Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.”

Cognitive therapy: Rigorous and careful research has shown that cognitive therapy is an effective treatment for depression and for several types of anxiety. A foundational principle of cognitive therapy is that our thoughts have direct and powerful impact on our feelings. Another way of saying this is "what we think affects how we feel". My professional assessment as a Christian psychiatrist is that our faith (confidence in God's goodness, love, care, protection) is the spiritual foundation upon which cognitive therapy can be most effective. One simple way to contribute to faith building is by recording, talking about, and thinking about examples of the Lord's observable interventions on our behalf.

This is completely consistent with biblical principles. Many scriptures address the importance of our thoughts - what we put in our minds and what we hold in our minds:

Rom 8:5&6 “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”

Phil 4:8 “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

2 Cor. 10:5 "..., and we take captive every thought to make it obedient unto Christ"

As discussed earlier, the scriptures also clearly teach that we should build our faith and confidence in the Lord by remembering specific examples of his care for us. These principles are clearly present in the old testament. These principles are clearly present in the new testament. These principles have been "discovered" by secular mental health professionals doing careful research in the 20th century.

Concerns: I realize that the questions/concerns discussed here include pastoral concerns and theological dilemmas that Christians have wrestled with for thousands of years. I am not even attempting to fully address these concerns. I do want to acknowledge that many people have problems with stories of supernatural intervention. I want to share some of the insights I have found to be helpful in response to these concerns. I especially want to encourage anyone reading these notes to identify stories that trouble them and/or to talk with me about any problems/concerns they have with this project.

A. Pop machine expectations: One concern has been that dwelling on stories of miraculous interventions and observable answers to prayer would encourage the belief that God is like a giant pop machine. Put in your quarter/prayer and expect to promptly receive whatever you have selected/requested. Several thoughts:

Everybody I know who has tried prayer (including myself) has discovered that the Lord cannot be controlled, manipulated, or used (like a pop machine or in any other way).

Everybody I know who has tried prayer (including myself) has plenty of experience with prayer that appears to go unanswered. Some of the most difficult faith challenges in my life have come when tragedy was not averted or when prayers seemed to go unanswered: "Why didn't the Lord prevent my cousin's death in an automobile accident?", "Why did Frank Sohar die of cancer even though hundreds were praying for his healing?". On some occasions I could later see that the Lord had heard my prayers but that He had plans that were even better. On many other occasions, however, my questions have remained unanswered. At these times I have found true stories of God's faithfulness to be extremely valuable. The many stories in which the Lord's love and faithfulness are clear help me to maintain faith in his presence and goodness during the tough times when my questions go unanswered, when I have been praying earnestly for some important concern but have not yet seen observable results.

I believe that the Lord hears every prayer, even when there are no obvious or immediate results. I believe that prayer is always good, that it always has a beneficial effect in some way. However, my own experience is that my prayers are often not answered at the time or in the way that I desire or request. Many of the stories described here illustrate the ways in which the Lord often answers prayer in his own time & in his own way.

B. Expectations of personal success and/or freedom from suffering: Another concern is that stories of the Lord's intervention can encourage the doctrine that being a Christian guarantees personal success and freedom from suffering. If God really exists, loves us, answers prayer, and is all powerful, then he should give his children all they ask for and protect them from harm - right? A friend from my church describes beginning her Christian life in a setting where this belief seemed to be held. She felt this attitude was encouraged by marked emphasis

on stories of the Lord's provision and protection without recognition of tragedy and suffering within the church. When she encountered tragedy in her own life her faith was deeply shaken. Several thoughts:

In response to my friends concern, I think it is important to recognize and acknowledge tragedy and suffering in the lives of Christians. To attempt to deny this only sets up young believers for disappointment and disillusionment. But it is also important to acknowledge and remember that at times the Lord does provide dramatic answers to prayer and does send supernatural protection.

Examination of the lives of well known spiritual giants reveals that they experience tragedy and suffering as well as dramatic answers to prayer and supernatural protection.

Paul the Apostle: "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them." (Acts 19:11&12). He also received supernatural protection (Acts 16:26). Even so, he still experienced tragedy and suffering. 2 Cor 11:24-27 describes in detail a huge portion of suffering in the life of the Apostle Paul: "five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea: and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked." One of my initial responses to this passage is "yeah, but he was suffering for his faith. That doesn't count as something the Lord should have prevented. Christians should expect to be persecuted for evangelism". Note, however, that multiple ship wrecks would seem like unnecessary tragedy which the Lord could certainly have spared someone working so diligently on his behalf. 2 Cor 12:8&9 describes an incident in Paul's life of "unanswered prayer" even after multiple specific requests. With respect to his "thorn in the flesh", Paul states: "three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"

Peter the Apostle: Peter experienced unusually dramatic and miraculous answers to prayer. Acts 5:12,15&16 is one of many references: "The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people....As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered from the towns around Jerusalem bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed." He also experienced supernatural protection (Acts 5:19, Acts 12:6-11). Once again miraculous answers to prayer and supernatural protection were not incompatible with tragedy and suffering. Peter was jailed repeatedly (Acts 5:18, Acts 12:3&4), beaten more than once (Acts 5:40,), and eventually crucified upside down.

Joseph: Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, thrown into a pit and sold into slavery. He spent seven years as a slave and seven years in prison. He had no contact with his beloved father or any other family members for 22 years. The Bible also reports that the Lord answered Joseph's prayers, blessed everything he did, and gave him favor in the eyes of just about everyone other than his brothers.

Missionaries such as Hudson Taylor: Hudson Taylor describes numerous and dramatic answers to prayer, including protection and provision. He also lost his wife and three of his

children to early death by disease on the Chinese mission field. Most of the mission families working with him lost at least one family member to disease.

Martyrs such as Betsy and Casper Ten Boom: In her book The Hiding Place, Corrie Ten Boom Corrie describes suffering terribly in German concentration camps, and that her father (Casper) and sister (Betsy) both died in German prisons or concentration camps. She also describes numerous and dramatic answers to prayer, including protection and provision for her and her family.

Jesus Christ: peerless for miraculous answers to prayer, Jesus was also beaten, scourged, and then crucified. He was not spared this terrible suffering even though he prayed specifically for deliverance from the cross (Luke 22:42): "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."

One of the ways the Lord intervenes is to be with us when tragedy and suffering do occur. Each of the stories of suffering and tragedy mentioned above include testimony to how the Lord's presence and comfort was adequate during the times of trial. As I continue to gather stories, I hope to include stories where tragedy and suffering occur, and where the Lord's presence/comfort was bigger than the tragedy and suffering.

C. Blaming the sufferer if the Lord does not intervene to prevent suffering/tragedy: Another potential problem is that these stories can result in blame and/or self condemnation for people who are suffering but feel that the Lord is not caring for them--that their prayers for help have not yet been answered. Reading stories of the Lord's interventions in other peoples lives could lead them to think/feel: "God is not taking care of me &/or answering my prayers because I am bad/I don't have enough faith/I am still sinning/God is punishing me...etc.. I think a most straightforward answer to this concern is to ponder again the lives of well known spiritual giants. If one does this, one quickly sees that the Lord allows tragedy and suffering in the lives even of his most faithful servants. As is obvious in the summaries above, each of the people mentioned experienced miraculous answers to prayer and supernatural protection on some occasions, but also tragedy and suffering on others occasions. It seems ludicrous to me to argue that the Lord allowed tragedy and suffering in these lives as punishment for disobedience or because lack of faith somehow limited His ability to intervene.

D. Questioning the Lord's goodness &/or power if He does not intervene to prevent suffering/tragedy: I have also observed that when we experience tragedy and/or suffering in our own lives, we then often have difficulty with stories of the Lord's intervention for others. Two responses seem to be common:

1. We don't want to believe in miraculous intervention because it is easier to believe God does not intervene in this way at all than to deal with #2. Those who already do believe in miraculous intervention just don't want to think about it.
2. We conclude that God is inadequate or a capricious jerk. He can and does intervene in other situations, but either doesn't have the fire power to care for everybody or chose not to intervene to prevent our cancer, our molestation. He can and does intervene, but was not able or chose not to protect our child, sibling, spouse, parent, or friend.

As C.S. Lewis says in A Grief Observed: "Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not, 'So there's no God after all,' but, 'So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer.' Pg. 5 "If God's goodness is inconsistent with

hurting us, then either God is not good or there is no God: for in the only life we know He hurts us beyond our worst fears and beyond all we can imagine.” Pg. 31 “No, my real fear is not of materialism. If it were true, we - or what we mistake for ‘we’ - could get out, get from under the harrow. An overdose of sleeping pills would do it. I am more afraid that we are really rats in a trap. Or, worse still, rats in a laboratory. Someone said, I believe, ‘God always geometrizes.’ Supposing the truth were ‘God always vivisects’? Sooner or later I must face the question in plain language. What reason have we, except our own desperate wishes, to believe that God is, by any standard we can conceive, ‘good’? Doesn’t all the prima facie evidence suggest exactly the opposite?” pp 33&34.

I have certainly gotten stuck at this place when things went wrong in my life.

I would like to propose a third alternative: face this difficult and painful question head on, but stay with it until we are able to trust in the Lord’s love for us, presence, and power even though others are spared while we have experienced tragedy. Even though the Lord clearly guides, protects, heals, provides, and delivers from evil, it is obvious that the Lord does not prevent all evil, does not heal all illness, does not prevent all tragedies. Is it possible to believe that the Lord is loving, present, and all powerful, but that He has chosen to limit his intervention against evil? Furthermore, is it possible to believe that His reasons for doing this (possibly involving free will? Opportunities to grow in faith? Situations where we are challenged to sacrifice to care for others? Reasons we cannot fathom?) are adequate?

As with questions about suffering in general, I have found two ways to attack this problem. I have wrestled with these questions theologically, philosophically, and intellectually (the excellent books mentioned above also address this specific question of why the Lord intervenes in some situations but not others). At the same time, I have worked to build my faith in the Lord to the place where the foundation for my trust in God’s goodness is strong enough to hold any unanswered part of this mystery. True stories of the Lord’s faithfulness have been an important part of building this foundation for me.

The “true story” faith building approach might appear to be circular: “read true stories so that you can trust the Lord enough to read true stories even though the Lord did not prevent your suffering.” I believe the process is actually a spiral. We can spiral down if we become bitter that the Lord did not prevent tragedy in our lives, and then refuse to see evidence of the Lord’s trustworthiness. As bitterness about our suffering increases it becomes ever more difficult to perceive and receive evidence of the Lord’s goodness, presence, and power. As we turn away from evidence of the Lord’s goodness, presence, and power we becoming increasingly bitter about the suffering in our lives. We can spiral up if we turn our hearts to the Lord even though he has allowed us to suffer, and then focus on evidence for the Lord’s trustworthiness. As we turn our hearts to the Lord it becomes easier to perceive and receive evidence of His love, presence, and power. As we focus on evidence of his love, presence, and power it becomes easier to turn to Him.

E. “What about evidence in the other direction?”: On a number of occasions as I was sharing a few of my stories, the person I was speaking with responded with something like “these are nice little stories, but what about all the tragedies? It seems like there are more examples of the Lord’s neglect than of the Lord’s faithfulness. If we are going to look at the positive stories we need to look at the negative stories as well. I think the evidence shows that if there is a God He can’t be trusted - He is either random, incompetent, or of limited power.” They then go on to describe all the tragedies reported in the news in the past day/week/month/year/decade, usually throwing in Auschwitz and the crusades for good measure. I think some people shy away from stories like the ones in this collection because they don’t want to face this tough question.

They think/feel at some intuitive level: “If I go down the path of looking at true stories of the Lord’s presence as a way to bolster my faith, someone will raise the question ‘what about all the evidence of His absence, negligence, or incompetence?’. Maybe it would be easier just to avoid the whole mess.” I would recommend, instead, dealing with this tough question directly so that it will not subtly impede our ability to appreciate and learn from stories in which the Lord is tangibly present &/or intervenes.

Note that this is not “why does the Lord allow suffering at all” (addressed above), but rather “if we really compare the evidence for and against, isn’t there more evidence for the Lord’s negligence, incompetence, absence?” I will not try to address this question thoroughly here, but I would like to identify what scientists and statisticians would call a sampling error. This insight first came to me during one of the conversations described above when I realized the person I was speaking with was comparing tragedies gathered by news teams from all over the world with the stories of the Lord’s faithfulness that I had collected from my own life and from my friends and family (sample size in group A = 4,000,000,000, sample size in group B = 300).

By reading the newspaper and watching the news on TV each day, we pay thousands of reporters to scour the planet for the most shocking tragedies and horrifying disasters. These news teams, with multimillion dollar budgets, then use the latest technology to serve up the most vivid samples from these newsworthy events. I can still remember the gruesome images from Vietnam that I saw in Life magazine as a child 35 years ago. Furthermore, as far as I know, when our diligent news teams cover the disasters and tragedies of the world they seldom ask “did you turn to the Lord for help during the worst moments of this crisis? Did you experience the Lord’s sustaining presence during the bombing? Are you experiencing His comforting presence as you deal with losses you have just suffered?”. My father recently told me a story which illustrates this point: Our church has a close relationship with a village in El Salvador. During the recent civil war, soldiers attacked this village. As the unarmed villagers (including women, children, and elderly) fled across the Lempa river into Honduras, soldiers with automatic weapons and helicopter gun ships fired mercilessly on the slow and defenseless targets. Tomasa Hernandez, one of the leaders of this village and a woman who had survived the massacre, was visiting with the leaders of our church. Dad remembers someone asking her “how have you dealt with the hard questions ‘where was the Lord? How can a loving God allow this kind of horror?’”. Her answer shocked him. “What do you mean? We could feel the Lord with us and protecting us. If the Lord had not been there powerfully protecting us and blocking the full impact of evil, we would all have been killed. We are grateful that the Lord saved so many of us.” Have you ever seen the following headlines on your morning paper or on the 6 o’clock news? “500 PASSENGERS ESCAPE DEATH IN GUATEMALA: GENTLE PROMPTING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WAKENS ENGINEER AND PREVENTS HORRIBLE TRAIN WRECK!”, “DISASTER AVERTED IN THE PHILLIPPINES: MIRACULOUS REPAIR OF UNDETECTED LANDING GEAR DEFECT AVERTS PLANE CRASH!”, “SURVIVORS OF SALVADORAN MASSACRE REPORT ‘NONE OF US WOULD HAVE SURVIVED IF IT HADN’T BEEN FOR THE LORD’S PRESENCE AND PROTECTION” or even “800 MILLION PARENTS LOVED THEIR CHILDREN LAST NIGHT!”

On the other hand, the situation is quite different with respect to stories of the Lord’s presence &/or protection. I recently read an account (unfortunately I can’t remember the reference) of a near death experience in which Jesus let the person see how our loving Father is protecting us in ways we are often not aware of. The Lord showed this person that millions of “potential” problems &/or tragedies are prevented by His subtle or even invisible protection. This story would indicate that we are possibly/probably not aware of most of the Lord’s protection even in our own personal experience. Even when we are aware that the Lord has

been present in some situation (comforting, caring, protecting), we often forget these experiences unless we make a conscious effort to record them (at least this is true for me). Many people share these stories only with their closest friends or family (or with no one at all). The average person certainly does not call the local newspaper or a national news network with "I just had the most amazing experience. I was approaching an intersection with a van full of children. I suddenly heard an audible adult male voice telling me to stop immediately. I did so, even though I had a green light. Just as I stopped, a truck ran the light at 35 m.p.h. I think the Lord just saved me and my children from a terrible car wreck!"

Returning to the sampling error theme - can you imagine a scientist or physician publishing the following research results?: "My study shows that bone cancer is more common than lung cancer: there have been only three cases of lung cancer in my church and extended family, compared to the thousands of cases of bone cancer in published medical literature". Can you imagine a statistician reporting "Taoism is a more prominent religion than Christianity, since there are only 367 Christians among Karl Lehman's personal acquaintances, whereas there are 57 million Taoists in the world"?