

Forrest Gump TRIVIA:

1. Of these three actors, which one turned down the role of Forrest Gump:
Bill Murray, John Travolta, Chevy Chase?

ALL THREE!

2. Would you believe that Ice Cube and Dave Chappelle turned down the role of Bubba??

3. Forrest is "*not a very smart man*" but Tom Hanks is; instead of being paid for the movie he took percentage points which ultimately netted him around \$40 million!

4. The running scene was actually inspired by an actual event. In 1982 16 year old Michael Figueroa ran from New Jersey to San Francisco for the American Cancer Society. His words were even used in the film,

"I just put one foot in front of the other. When I get tired I sleep. When I get hungry I eat. When I have to go to the bathroom, I go."

5. How many of what soft drink did Gump drink before meeting JFK?

15 Dr. Peppers

6. Tom Hanks did not want to use a thick Southern accent for Forrest; but the director insisted. The kid who played young Forrest was found at a local audition and actually talked like that. Hanks patterned his accent after the real life kid.

7. How many ways does Bubba say there are to prepare shrimp? 21

Barbecue it
Boil it
Broil it
Bake it
Sauté it
Shrimp kabobs
Shrimp Creole
Shrimp gumbo
Pan fried
Deep fried
Stir fried

Pineapple shrimp
Lemon shrimp
Coconut shrimp
Pepper shrimp
Shrimp soup
Shrimp stew
Shrimp salad
Shrimp and potatoes
Shrimp burger
Shrimp sandwich...that's about it.

SELAH

Forrest Gump was a kid born into this world with more going against him than most people.

He talked funny.

He wasn't very bright.

He wore huge awkward braces on his legs.

Grew up without a father.
Not a lot of money.
Chased by bullies.
His mother & Jenny were all he had going for him.

He was born into adversity. And adversity followed Forrest into adulthood.

Fought in Viet Nam, where it rained sideways for 4 months at a time.

Held his best friend, Bubba, in his arms as he died in a fire fight.

He saw Lt. Dan lose both his legs. Saw fellow soldiers lose their lives.

Went into the shrimp business only to pull up trash in his nets.

Jenny kept running away from him.

But through it all, Forrest kept running. Sometimes physically, and other times metaphorically. He just kept going. Kept trying things. Kept moving forward in spite of challenges and adversity.

And he not only weathered the storms; he came out on top:

A college All-American football player for Bear Bryant.

Met Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Baines Johnson & Richard Nixon.

Received the Medal of Honor

Went on television.

Became an international ping pong sensation.

Became a "gazillionaire" from Bubba Gump Shrimp and Apple stock.

Went for a run and profoundly influenced people beyond his own comprehension.

And eventually, got the girl. Albeit for a short time, Jenny came home—along with their son, Forrest.

And this may be why this movie was such a colossal hit:

A slow-witted man keeps getting hit with adversity, but keeps running, keeps churning, and ultimately finds success in a world that says he's not wired for success.

And truth be told, all of us--deep down...have parts of our life where we feel like Forrest Gump. If we could somehow look into each other's hearts—we'd see areas where we feel like we don't measure up:

Not smart enough,
Lean enough,
Kind enough.
Don't make money enough
Not generous enough
Attractive enough
Don't worship enough
Pray enough
Feel secure enough
Love enough
Care enough
Feel enough
Tell the truth enough.
Avoid sin enough.
Dream enough.
Aspire enough.
Not humble enough.

Maybe the one thing that ties us together more than anything is that we all got some Gump.

And when we see Gump weather the storm and not just survive, but thrive, we smile.

And for a few seconds, the power of a good story makes us think, "Maybe with all of my Gumpiness—I could come out on top too!"

We root for a guy like Gump because we're secretly rooting for ourselves.

SELAH

I think it's noteworthy what Gump didn't do. He didn't fester and stall out around questions like:

"Why did God give me these legs that need braces?"
"Why can't I be smarter?"
"Why did Bubba have to die?"
"Why does Jenny keep running from me?"

Perhaps one of the things that sidetracks Christ followers is the "Obsession of the Why."

When we encounter adversity, our first reaction is to focus on the "why." As if it's our right to know why this challenge is upon us.

Or as if God is a logical God: "If I can just figure out WHY God allowed this or did this, I can make sense of it and then proceed."

Am I the only one who plays the "Why God" game? Do you sometimes get stuck in the mode of asking God, "Why did this bad thing happen?"

Do you know what's wrong with the "Why God?" game?

1. God never says there's a why to everything.

Instead he promises to be with us *in* and *through* everything.
Everything doesn't have a "why" that's tied to us learning something.
Sometimes in a fallen world bad things crash into us.

2. When we're stewing over the "why," we're focusing on the past.
And when we're focused on the past and obsessing on the "why" it keeps us from moving forward into God's preferred future.

As long as we're asking, "Why God?" we're NOT asking questions that can move us forward: questions like,

"How do you want me to respond to this, God?"
"God, how can I grow closer to You through this?"
"What next, God?"

And the *one line* from the movie that summed up Gump's life and our life?

"My momma always said, 'Life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get.'"

In other words, God never said all the chocolates are going to be good. Some will be those hideous solid coconut or dry-tree-sap disasters! ;-)

In fact, if we read the Bible, God clearly lays out a life of adversity and happiness; hills and valleys.

The Bible is not the story of America where everyone lives in a nice house, with nice cars, a riding lawnmower and dozens of electronic devices with a hedge of protection that keeps us safe from
pain,
loss,
tension,
stress and testing.

American Christianity responds to challenges and setbacks with the question, "Why God? Why did this happen to me?"
The focus is on US.

Biblical Christianity understands that life is like a box of chocolates—some things will be hard to swallow—unpleasant—but God promises to be with us and get us through.
Biblically the focus is on God, not us.

SELAH

As I've been looking at Gump this week, it's occurred to me how much the Apostle Paul reminds me of him. (Not that Paul was slow witted in the least.)

But how Paul kept going, and going and going in the face of adversity:

He was blinded,
jailed,
beat with rods,
stoned and left for dead,
shipwrecked (TWICE),
bitten by a poisonous snake!

Paul never got preoccupied with, "Why me?" He stayed preoccupied with Christ--and all the while kept running—kept proclaiming the gospel—kept advancing the kingdom of God.

I thought it would be appropriate if when we walked out of here today, we knew nearly as much about Paul as we do Forrest Gump. Let's do a mini character study of him.

Paul was born, Saul of Tarsus (Modern Turkey). He was a Pharisee.

Pharisees were a very strict sect of Jew. They were the sect that pushed to have Christ crucified.

Growing up, Paul had the finest Jewish instruction available.

Paul was UBER religious—extremely strictly adhering to the Laws of the Torah. So first—understand this is a very devout Jewish man and also a citizen of Rome.

As a devout Jewish man, the followers of Jesus, or "The Way" were heretical. (Heretical means contrary to the ways of God.)

The Jews killed Jesus for heresy. To them He was being heretical in claiming to be God's Son.

So the Jews looked at the followers of Jesus somewhat the same way that Christians now look at people trying to get prayer out of school and get Christianity completely out of the government.

So when we run across Saul in Acts ch. 9 we find him out looking for Christians to round up, beat up and lock up.

Acts 9:1-6 nlt

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers.^[a] So he went to the high priest. ² He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

³ As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

⁵ "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked.

Ok—he hears a voice from heaven and he doesn't freak out—in fact Saul calls him Lord. Why?

Because a devout Jew knew that God sometimes audibly spoke to His people to give them instruction or redirect them.

So this was within the realm of what a Jew at that time might expect.

So on one hand, God audibly talking to him makes sense.

On the other hand, Saul doesn't understand the question, "Why are you persecuting me?"

Because in Saul's mind, he's NOT persecuting God—he's DEFENDING God---in Saul's mind he's persecuting these heretical misguided people who are messing up the Jewish faith that's all about God.

So for Saul to hear God, say, "Why are you persecuting me?" He had to be thinking, "Whoa—what is happening here?!"

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! ⁶ Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Now THIS part—MUST have BLOWN HIS MIND.

Because Saul believes that like Elwood Blues, he is literally on a mission from God, to round up the heretical followers of The Way.

The voice does not say I am GOD. He says I am JESUS!

So can you imagine how dazed and shocked Saul must have been?

He BELIEVES he's tracking down misguided followers of Jesus—and the voice that he AND THE MEN WITH HIM heard, WAS JESUS! *That* would mess a guy up!

In the next few verses, the voice of Jesus Himself gives Saul the mission to take Jesus' mission to the gentiles—non-Jews.

Later Saul (Acts 13:9) goes by Paul. The Bible doesn't say why the name change; but we can assume that since Paul is a Roman name it would more easily allow him to rub shoulders with gentiles than the very Jewish name, Saul.

So Saul, who was wired by God to have a ton of zeal and passion for God's Kingdom as a Jew—get's redirected to funnel that energy and passion into spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ to the non-Jewish people of that part of the world. And from then on, goes by Paul.

So there on the Damascus Road, Jesus speaks audibly so that Paul and his friends hear Him—giving Paul super clear marching orders of what to do with his life (Isn't that our dream?).

You'd think, "Wow—this dude's path is clear, commissioned by Jesus Himself—what could go wrong?"

(Read **Acts 16:16-34**)

¹⁶ One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a demon-possessed slave girl. She was a fortune-teller who earned a lot of money for her masters. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved."

¹⁸ This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And instantly it left her.

¹⁹ Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. ²⁰ "The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted to the city officials. ²¹ "They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice."

²² A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. ²³ They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. ²⁴ So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶ Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! ²⁷ The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. ²⁸ But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household." ³² And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. ³³ Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. ³⁴ He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

If this is you or me—after we're stripped and severely beaten—aren't we calling a time out?

Isn't this our moment of, "Why God? Seriously? You asked me to do this mission KNOWING this would happen? Why God?"

And as the situation spirals into a hideous 1st century jail scene—they keep their focus on Christ—they just keep running in a Gumpian way.

And when the earthquake comes instead of running for their lives—they allow God to use them to save the jailer and everyone in his household!

(Read **Acts 21:27-22:7**)

²⁷ The seven days were almost ended when some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul in the Temple and roused a mob against him. They grabbed him, ²⁸ yelling, “Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who preaches against our people everywhere and tells everybody to disobey the Jewish laws. He speaks against the Temple—and even defiles this holy place by bringing in Gentiles.^[a]” ²⁹ (For earlier that day they had seen him in the city with Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus,^[b] and they assumed Paul had taken him into the Temple.)

³⁰ The whole city was rocked by these accusations, and a great riot followed. Paul was grabbed and dragged out of the Temple, and immediately the gates were closed behind him. ³¹ As they were trying to kill him, word reached the commander of the Roman regiment that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He immediately called out his soldiers and officers^[c] and ran down among the crowd. When the mob saw the commander and the troops coming, they stopped beating Paul.

³³ Then the commander arrested him and ordered him bound with two chains. He asked the crowd who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ Some shouted one thing and some another. Since he couldn’t find out the truth in all the uproar and confusion, he ordered that Paul be taken to the fortress. ³⁵ As Paul reached the stairs, the mob grew so violent the soldiers had to lift him to their shoulders to protect him. ³⁶ And the crowd followed behind, shouting, “Kill him, kill him!”

³⁷ As Paul was about to be taken inside, he said to the commander, “May I have a word with you?”

“Do you know Greek?” the commander asked, surprised. ³⁸ “Aren’t you the Egyptian who led a rebellion some time ago and took 4,000 members of the Assassins out into the desert?”

³⁹ “No,” Paul replied, “I am a Jew and a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia, which is an important city. Please, let me talk to these people.” ⁴⁰ The commander agreed, so Paul stood on the stairs and motioned to the people to be quiet. Soon a deep silence enveloped the crowd, and he addressed them in their own language, Aramaic.^[d]

“Brothers and esteemed fathers,” Paul said, “listen to me as I offer my defense.” ² When they heard him speaking in their own language,^[e] the silence was even greater.

³ Then Paul said, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. ⁴ And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to

death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. ⁵ The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the Christians from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished.

⁶ “As I was on the road, approaching Damascus about noon, a very bright light from heaven suddenly shone down around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’

Here we go again—grabbed by a MOB—a great RIOT ensued—they were trying to KILL him.

Once again—GREAT timing for the pity party dance—if life is a box of chocolates this is a good time to wonder,

“Will I ever get one of the rich yummy chocolate truffles?” Or just troubles...

Paul keeps focusing on Christ—keeps chuggin along—stays focused...He uses this moment to SHARE CHRIST with the mob that was trying to kill him.

Again, there’s this parallel between Paul & Gump—they both keep running, moving forward...as the challenges of this life keep coming at them –just like life’s challenges keep coming at us—and Paul and Gump stay focused and keep moving ahead. They don’t stop for “Why God?” distractions.

The thing is, Gump doesn’t know what his motivation is. Paul does. And he sums it up in Acts 20:24

But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God. **Acts 20:24**

And just as Forrest had things he could not overcome (talking funny, being mentally slow) **Galatians 12:7** says that Paul was given a “thorn in his flesh.” Something that tormented Paul that God wouldn’t take away.

→

Some kind of hindrance. Something Paul wished he could change. We don’t know what it is.

But see how Paul responds to this—without asking “Why God?”

Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:8-10

Friends, when challenges come on us—and they do—there is a temptation to be self-focused .

When we are aware of our shortcomings—the thorns in our flesh—there is a temptation to be self-focused.

But what an incredible model Paul is to us in how to respond to life’s challenges.

He keeps his eye on Christ...keeps his focus on the Kingdom of God...
In every challenge He’s looking for how to influence the world for Christ.

And Paul is able to do that—and you and I are able to do that—
not because of the fortitude of a Forrest Gump.
But because Jesus has overcome this world and everything it throws at us.

Listen to the words of Christ to the disciples—and to us.

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

John 16:33 nlt

Jesus overcame the world and all of our challenges, not so we can continue on living our comfortable American life—

Rather so we, like Paul, can continue working on behalf of Christ in this world to proclaim Christ to this world!

So what do you need Christ to overcome for you today?

A marriage that’s out of hope & out of ideas...

A challenging child...

An illness or disease...

A scary employment situation...

A relationship that’s on the rocks...

A relationship with Christ that you can’t seem to fully give yourself to...

An addiction you can’t seem to beat...

A safe American life vs an adventurous God-centered life...

Being single in married world...

Having no idea what the next chapter in your life looks like?

song “**Take Heart**” by Hillsong United <http://tinyurl.com/6bn9v4t>