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# *Bless Your Heart*

THE MOST POPULAR Southernism by far is “Bless your heart.” Other variations less popular are “bless your little heart” or “bless your peapickin’ heart.” While the exact origin cannot be pinpointed, this sweet, sometimes syrupy saying became popular in the nineteenth century. Perhaps you’ve been the recipient of this expression and wondered if you’ve just been consoled or cursed. Well, allow me to help you decipher the meaning of this sugary Southernism.

Sometimes “Bless your heart” can be as genuine as “Oh, honey, I’m sorry that such and such happened to you.” Of course, other times it means, “Aw, poor thing, you’re dumb as a brick.”

But how can you tell the difference? One way I have found is by paying close attention to the facial expressions of the person blessing your heart. Does her face appear genuine, caring, or compassionate? If so, that’s a Southerner letting you know she is empathizing with you, which is a good thing. However, if the person’s face has a smirk, a sly expression, or if she appears to be stifling a laugh, then you know you’ve been blessed as stupid, and the person giving the blessing didn’t want to come right out and hurt your feelings. So, “Bless your heart” can be both a compliment and a slight, but never at the same time.

The apostle Paul instructed Christians in the first-century church

when he wrote, “Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony” (Colossians 3:12–14).

As Christians, a sincere “Bless your heart” aligns perfectly with this Scripture. We are called to show love, patience, and kindness to everyone. We are to be moved with compassion and empathy, not judgment and bitterness. There is enough cynicism and criticism running rampant in our culture. Let us choose not to participate. Instead, may we intentionally cultivate tenderhearted mercy. Live gently and humbly. Extend forgiveness to those who wrong us. The next time we’re about to bless someone’s heart, let’s pause for a moment to examine our own and make sure it is pleasing to God.

**JESUS**, thank you for demonstrating grace, patience, and most of all, love to me. Help me reflect those virtues as I interact with others. Cultivate a tender heart in me, and teach me to walk in humility. Amen.



## 2

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# *Cattywampus*

CATTYWAMPUS. OR IS it catawampus? Catiwampus? Or Catawampous?

No matter how you spell it, the meaning is the same. While etymologists aren't quite sure of the origin of this far-flung word, the definition is generally agreed upon. In the South, if something is cattywampus, it's out of sorts, in disarray, askew.

Has your life ever felt cattywampus? Perhaps it feels that way even now. Have you ever wondered, "What in the world am I doing?" Or perhaps, "How did I end up here?" The good news is that you're not alone. Social media paints a false picture of people living their best life, everything perfect, nothing out of place or amiss. In reality, a perfect life is an illusion. No matter how put-together, wealthy, or well-known a person is, we all have cattywampus places in our lives. Some people are just better at hiding them than others.

Proverbs 3:5–6 reads, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (ESV).

What an encouraging thought. No matter how many missteps, mistakes, or misunderstandings we make, God can take our crooked, cattywampus paths and straighten them out. But there is a caveat. We

must first place our trust in the Lord. That means we must believe and acknowledge that He knows best.

When things in our lives are out of sorts, it's typical to reach out to another person and get her take on the matter. While that's not wrong, it's best to make it a habit of talking to God first and reading some Bible verses. The book of Psalms, full of comfort and encouragement, and Proverbs, abundant with practical wisdom for daily living, are both a great place to start. That way we ensure we don't elevate the thoughts or opinions of ourselves or anyone else above the wisdom of God. It's not easy to admit we don't have the answers, but it's only in doing so that we can learn to lean on His wisdom and walk in His ways on straight paths.

Author Stormie Omartian shared insight about the importance of prayer when she wrote, "Seeking God first will always put us in the correct position and aim us in the right direction to move into the future God has for us."<sup>1</sup>

**LORD**, I'm feeling out of sorts. My life is catty-wampus. Things I have placed my hope and trust in haven't materialized. I need you to make sense of the chaos and straighten things out. Help me trust in you with all my heart, and teach me to follow your ways instead of my own. Amen.