Why We Shouldn’t Date Non-Christians

Kyle Skaggs examines theological and sociological reasons why it’s a bad idea for Christ-followers to date unbelievers.

Should you date a non-Christian? The world tells us, “Why not? You can’t help who you are attracted to. As long as you don’t force your beliefs on the person you’re dating, there won’t be a problem.” But what do we say? To provide a biblical answer to this question, let’s assume that you, the hypothetical Christian single, are dating with the purpose of marriage.

According to the Christian worldview, believers are to seek out a marriage that honors God. We are to leave our parents and join as one flesh with our spouse (Genesis 2:24), being faithful by reserving sex and romantic attention for that one person and only that one person (Exodus 20:14, Proverbs 6:20-35, Matthew 5:27). This way, a marriage that honors God places His will above your own desires. In order to best do this, your marriage needs to be religiously homogamous. In other words, you need to marry another Christian.

The scripture concerning marrying a non-Christian is straightforward. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 warns against doing it because being unequally yoked will cause us to stumble in our walk with Christ. While there is no verse that explicitly mentions dating non-Christians, what applies to marriage clearly applies to dating as well. Dating is courtship, an intentional step on the road to marriage. How you go about dating will affect how you go about marriage. There are three areas of concern when it comes to dating non-Christians. The first is your personal walk with Christ. The second is loving and honoring your spouse. Third is raising your children as Christians.

Therefore, I find it's good to explore why we are told not to be unequally yoked beyond "because the Bible says so," as well as the practical concerns of courting non-believers. There are some who would argue that it is fine to date non-Christians. Some of the arguments they give are decent. Others are not so good. I will be paraphrasing some arguments I've personally heard. For context, we must first explore why we are told not to marry unbelievers.

When the people of Israel were preparing to enter the promised land, God commanded them multiple times not to marry or intermingle with the people they were being sent to drive out, because God was having Israel drive them out. They were marked for judgment because of their wickedness. The Lord makes the consequences of intermingling with the Canaanites clear:

> "…lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods." (Exodus 34:15-16 ESV)

Again in Deuteronomy, the Israelites were commanded to drive out the nations who inhabited the Promised Land, "…that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God" (20:16-18 ESV).

"So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth." (Judges 3:5-7 ESV)

Yoking with unbelievers creates a stumbling block for you in

your relationship with God, and as you can see from Israel's history, marriage to unbelievers leads to sin because it is the believer who compromises their faith. Take Solomon as an example. He was a man of wisdom and integrity who built the temple in Jerusalem. Like his father David, he disobeyed the Lord's command to Israel's kings not to take many wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). Unlike his father, many of Solomon's wives were foreigners who evidently did not stop worshiping the gods of their homelands, since Solomon was convinced to build altars for those gods. Why did he marry all these pagan women? I can't say. He probably thought he could handle them.

This set Israel on a cycle of idolatry, oppression, and repentance much like the one in Judges.

To this, some might say, "But we aren't living in the Old Testament," or "that applied to the Hebrews in their particular context of taking the Promised Land.". Even later scripture contains the exact same message.

> Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? . . . What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."(2 Corinthians 6:14-18 ESV)

The believer and the unbeliever live in two different realities. One is light, with God revealing sin and calling the believer to be more like Christ, while the other is darkness, with an apathetic attitude towards God's values. The ungodly do not know or care for God's laws. As the believer pulls towards God, the unbeliever pulls away. They do this

because God intrudes more on the relationship as He changes the believer. Over time, the relationship will most likely become strained and bitter. The believer is forced to choose between pleasing God and pleasing the person they are dating. This conflict is amplified after marriage.

This is supported by scientific studies as well. Studies have found that couples belonging to differing religions have more frequent conflicts than those of the same faith.{1} In South Korea, a study found that Christian couples with similar attitudes towards religion and church attendance reported happier marriages.{2} The same trend was found in an American study.{3} Being unequally yoked has negative effects on your relationship with your spouse.

Being unequally yoked affects more than your relationship with God. It affects your children as well. After you are married, your children will be taught conflicting ways to live, which will more often than not lead them away from Christ. “When couples belong to different faiths or have different levels of religiosity, their children cannot easily acquire a shared set of beliefs.”{4}

It also has a negative effect on your relationship with your children.{5} In a study by George Fox University based on a survey by Knowledge Works, religious discord in heterogamous marriages (marriages between spouses with religious differences) in turn affected the children. Fathers who were more religious than their wives felt less close to their children because of their differing attitudes towards faith. In a study by Petts and Knoester,{6} school-age children with unequally yoked parents are twice as likely to use alcohol and three times as likely to use marijuana than children with same-faith parents.” According to Petts’ study, children younger than school age in low income urban homes have been found to experience a negative correlation between their parents’ uneven religiosity and positive behaviors. In Bartkowski’s 2008 study,{7} the frequency of parental

arguments over religion is negatively associated with child development at kindergarten age. From these studies, it can be inferred that choosing to marry a fellow Christian will benefit your future children far more than yoking yourself to a non-believer.

Some Objections (Good and Bad)

Two objections I have heard after presenting the scriptural and scientific evidence are “I still don’t think it’s a big deal, because God has told people to be unequally yoked,” and “What if I use dating as an opportunity to witness to them?”

A possible third option is the “I don’t care” response, which is not an objection, because there is no argument being made. It is beyond frustrating, because it makes the conversation meaningless. If you find yourself saying something along those lines at this point in the article, then you’ve already made up your mind.

As a Christian, your first responsibility to nonbelievers is to live a Christlike life, showing the love of Jesus with the intent to introduce them to the Good News of the gospel of Christ. This especially extends to your dating. Christians are told to date and ultimately marry other believers because they are taught that marriage is holy before God.

One objection I’ve heard against what I’ve been saying goes: “But didn’t Hosea marry a whore on God’s command? What if God told me to date this person?” This was an attempt to argue that God’s singular exception justifies courting a non-Christian.

Yes, God did tell Hosea to marry a prostitute. No, it is not the same thing, because the woman Hosea married was a sinner, not a non-believer. First, this argument is too divorced from the context of scripture to be valid. Second, Hosea was a unique individual, one whom God raised up as a prophet. Third,

the purpose of this marriage was to show Israel how they were unfaithful to God when the woman inevitably slept with other men! It was certainly not a good marriage. So unless you're a prophet whom God is telling to use your horrible dating life as an object lesson, you can't say that it's good for you to date a non-Christian.

Missionary Dating: A Lukewarm Fantasy

Speaking of exceptions, there is one scenario people have been using to excuse being unevenly yoked for decades if not centuries: missionary dating. There's this prevailing idea among young Christians that you can date someone for the purpose of sharing the gospel with them.

This is the fiction of missionary dating. It is what Christians tell themselves to justify an unwise decision. First, it attempts to wed (pun intended) two activities that do not complement each other. Courtship involves getting to know someone in order to decide whether you will marry them, while evangelism involves getting to know someone as part of a discipleship process. Dating with the intent to bring someone to Christ tries to reconcile the equal power dynamic of courtship with the mentor-student power dynamic of discipleship. This is not a good plan.

Second, missionary dating leaves you as your date's only window into Christianity. Evangelism can require more than one person ministering to the unbeliever. It is a team effort even when we don't see it. Dating, on the other hand, is more exclusive.

Third, no one can serve two masters. You will love one and hate the other. You will favor either ministry or dating to the exclusion of the other. The temptation to stop ministering in favor of dating is stronger. The consequence of this is that you make compromises as all close relationships do, and present an imperfect picture of God's kingdom. If in your

date’s eyes, you live just like everyone else, they will not see what it means to give oneself up to Christ.

When you date someone, always be examining yourself. Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal the contents of your heart to you. The Lord does not tell us to sin against Him. Anything contrary to what God commands us to do in Scripture is from the devil. To that end, missionary dating can only be effective for those who are able to use wisdom and discernment. It is inadvisable for those who are not spiritually mature. I’m sure Christians have been saved because of missionary dating, but they are few and far between.

Sending the Wrong Message

Finally, choosing to date a non-Christian instead of ministering to them is foolish because of the message you send. When you date someone like this, you are telling them that you either don’t care about God or you don’t care they are going to hell. It is more important to you that they pour themselves into a relationship with you then it is for them to come to know Christ. On the other hand, prioritizing evangelism and discipleship shows them you want them to share in the kingdom of God.

In conclusion, dating a non-Christian is counterproductive to your walk with Christ. Scripture warns us against marrying non-believers, so why risk falling in love with one? We see time and time again just how easily it can indirectly damage your relationship with God. They do not know your God, nor do they honor Him. The excuses for dating non-believers are logically unsound at worst, and at best cannot stand the test of God’s word. Dating a non-Christian will also cause unneeded drama, and should you choose to tie the knot, that conflict will become worse. This will make the lives of your future children needlessly complicated, their development will be hindered because of you

and your spouse's fighting, and they will not be shown what a stable and godly family looks like, nor will you be able to effectively raise them to love and fear God. Missionary dating is counterproductive for both dating and evangelism. The people I know who were successful in it admitted that they went through a lot of unnecessary hardship. It is better to remain as friends at least until they come to know Christ. This shows that you care more for the state of their relationship with God than your own wants, and enables you to minister to them through your relationship.

Notes

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The Dangerous Ideology of Transgenderism

Transgenderism has been the topic in the news for more than a decade; therefore, Christians need to know what to think about the various claims being made. We also need to know how to respond to an aggressive push by trans activists to normalize this behavior and criticize anyone who does not accept it.

Transgenderism is the belief that people have a "gender identity" that is distinct from their biological sex. If they feel there is a conflict between their gender and their sex, gender identity should take precedence. Although a very small fraction of the population may experience gender dysphoria (where a person experiences discomfort or distress from a mismatch between their biological sex and the gender they want to be), the current percentage of Americans identifying as transgender or nonbinary (not identifying as either male or female, masculine or feminine) has exploded.

Sexuality, Gender, and Medical Studies

Dr. Paul McHugh has served as the Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Johns Hopkins Medical School. He has concluded that "gender reassignment surgery" doesn't work. He, along with Dr. Lawrence Mayer, surveyed over 200 peer-reviewed

studies done in various disciplines.{1} Here are four of the most important conclusions from their paper:

First, the "belief that sexual orientation is an innate, biologically fixed human property" is not supported. In other words, people are not "born that way."

Second, the "belief that gender identity is an innate, fixed human property independent of biological sex—so that a person might be a man trapped in a woman's body or a woman trapped in a man's body—is not supported by scientific evidence."

Third, "only a minority of children who express gender-atypical thoughts or behavior will continue to do so into adolescence or adulthood." It goes on to say that children should not be encouraged to become transgender. They also should not be subjected to hormone treatments or surgery.

Fourth, people who are homosexual or transgender "have higher rates of mental problems (anxiety, depression, suicide), as well as behavioral and social problems (substance abuse, intimate partner violence), than the general population."

While the paper only focuses on the scientific research, it obviously has implications for public policy. Incorrect scientific claims have been used to justify court rulings, government policies, and medical practices concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. They have not been based upon sound science.

American College of Pediatricians

Above, we talked about some of the scientific research into homosexuality and transgenderism. Dr. Paul McHugh and Dr. Lawrence Mayer surveyed over 200 peer-reviewed studies and came to conclusions that are contrary to much of the current statements being made by trans activists.

Dr. Paul McHugh was also one of the authors of a statement by the American College of Pediatricians. The title of their statement was: “Gender Ideology Harms Children.”{2}Here is a summary sentence or two of the eight points they make in their statement.

1. “Human sexuality is an objective biological binary trait: XY and XX are genetic markers of health, not genetic markers of a disorder.”

2. “No one is born with a gender: Everyone is born with a biological sex. Gender (an awareness and sense of oneself as male or female) is a sociological and psychological concept; not an objective biological one.”

3. “A person’s belief that he or she is something they are not is, at best, a sign of confused thinking.”

4. “Puberty is not a disease and puberty-blocking hormones can be dangerous.”

5. “According to the DSM-V [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition], as many as 98% of gender-confused boys and 88% of gender-confused girls eventually accept their biological sex after naturally passing through puberty.”

6. “Pre-pubertal children diagnosed with gender dysphoria may be given puberty blockers as young as eleven, and will require cross-sex hormones in later adolescence to continue impersonating the opposite sex. These children will never be able to conceive any genetically related children even via artificial reproductive technology. In addition, cross-sex hormones (testosterone and estrogen) are associated with dangerous health risks including but not limited to cardiac disease, high blood pressure, blood clots, stroke, diabetes, and cancer.”

7. “Rates of suicide are nearly twenty times greater among

adults who use cross-sex hormones and undergo sex reassignment surgery, even in Sweden which is among the most LGBTQ-affirming countries."

8. "Conditioning children into believing that a lifetime of chemical and surgical impersonation of the opposite sex is normal and healthful is child abuse."

Gender Dysphoria Research

Abigail Shrier wrote about the transgender craze in her book *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*.{3} In my radio interview with her, she explained that "gender dysphoria" was characterized by severe and persistent discomfort in one's biological sex. It typically begins in early childhood. In previous generations, it afflicted a sliver of the population (roughly .01 percent) and occurred mostly in boys.

Prior to 2012, there was no scientific literature on girls (11-21) ever having developed gender dysphoria at all. Then the Western world experienced a sudden surge of adolescents claiming to have gender dysphoria and self-identifying as "transgender."

In 2016, Lisa Littman (an ob-gyn, public health researcher) was scrolling through social media when she noticed a statistical peculiarity. Several adolescents (most of them girls) from a small town in Rhode Island had come out as transgender. In fact, they were all from the same friend group.

She admitted that she knew very little about gender dysphoria, but this statistical anomaly was interesting to her. And she then noticed there had been a sudden spike in the Western World of girls experiencing gender dysphoria. She immersed herself in the scientific literature on gender dysphoria to try to understand what was happening. Perhaps it was due to

increased social acceptance of LGBTQ people, but she suggested in a peer-reviewed paper that the girls might be rushing toward “transition” because of peer contagion. As you might imagine, her suggestion was roundly criticized. She was also accused of anti-trans bigotry.

In a subsequent research project, she collected data anonymously from 256 parents whose kids had not met the criteria of gender dysphoria in childhood, but suddenly identified as transgender in adolescence. She identified 16 traits in common. Here are a few.

1. The vast majority have zero indicators of childhood gender dysphoria.

2. Almost a third of them did not seem at all gender dysphoric.

3. A majority had one or more psychiatric diagnosis and almost half were engaged in self-harm prior to the onset of dysphoria.

4. Nearly 70 percent of the teenagers belonged to a peer group in which at least one friend had also come out as transgender.

5. Among parents who knew their children’s social status, over 60 percent said the announcement brought a popularity boost.

6. Over 88 percent of the parents surveyed reported being supportive of transgender rights.

There is growing evidence that social contagion is a much better explanation for the notable increase in the number of young people (especial young women) who now claim to be transgender.

Promotion of Transgenderism

Transgenderism has been promoted through social media, through the schools, and even through the medical establishment. Abigail Shrier began to look at the influence of social media on this transgender craze. In her chapter on “The Influencers” she talks about trans promoters who have become a YouTube sensation. We are seeing similar promoters on TikTok and other social media platforms. Here are a few of the ideas she discovered.

1. If you think you might be trans, you are.

2. Testosterone is amazing. It may just solve all your problems.

3. If your parents love you, they will support your trans identity.

4. Deceiving parents and doctors is justified, if it helps transition.

5. You don’t have to identify as the opposite sex to be trans.

She also found that transgenderism was being promoted through the schools. One program coordinator she talked to acknowledged that the “role of schools has changed.” Now “schools have expanded to be the hub for a lot more social services and looking more holistically, emotionally, at what’s going on with children.” In other words, they have become a “source of social justice.”

You might wonder how schools teach about transgenderism to young children. Teachers begin by talking about gender identity. A book intended for kindergarten teachers to read to their students reinforces the idea that gender is a social construct. It begins with a familiar origin story: “Babies can’t talk, so grown-ups make a guess by looking at their

bodies. This is the sex assigned to you at birth, male or female." It then provides a list of gender options: trans, genderqueer, non-binary, gender fluid, transgender, gender neutral, agender, bigender, etc.

Transgender charts and diagrams are being used in many schools. There is a "Genderbread Person" that is supposed to help children sort through how their gender identity and their gender expression relates to their biological sex. And there is a "Gender Unicorn" that is supposed to help them understand who they may be physically attracted to and emotionally attracted to.

The American Psychological Association has even put together guidelines for the Care of Transgender and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) patients. Doctors must provide "gender affirming care" which is defined as being "respectful, aware, and supportive of the identities and life experiences of TGNC people."

How to Respond to the Transgender Moment

Ryan Anderson is the author of the book, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*.{4} When I interviewed him on his book, he explained how transgender ideology promotes the opportunity for children to change their gender with surgery and drugs. And parents "are told that puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones may be the only way to prevent their children from committing suicide."

Ryan Anderson countered that the best studies of gender dysphoria have found "that between 80 and 95 percent of children who express a discordant gender identity will come to identify with their bodily sex if natural development is allowed to proceed." He also documented that even children going through "transitioning" treatment still have an extraordinarily high rate of suicide attempts compared to the

general population.

He reminded us that we should be tolerant and loving toward children (and adults) who struggle with their gender identity. But we should also be aware of the potential harm when transgender identity is normalized.

Unfortunately, we are living in a world where transgender activists want more than tolerance and kindness. They demand affirmation. We aren't allowed to question whether using medical treatments to aid in transgender transformation is positive for children. In his book, Ryan Anderson shows that the best biology, psychology, and philosophy support an understanding of sex as a bodily reality. As he puts it: "Biology isn't bigotry."

Abigail Shrier also offers several suggestions. First, don't get your kid a smartphone. She explains that nearly every problem teenagers face traces itself back to the introduction of the smartphone years ago.

Second, don't relinquish your authority as a parent. You don't have to go along with every idea your teenager has, nor do you have to go along with every educational or psychological fad being promoted in society.

Third, don't support gender ideology in your child's education. She provides an example of what happens when schools do a seminar on anorexia or suicide. Often the prevalence increases. A small number of students may have gender confusion or gender dysphoria. But talking about it will spread confusion.

Finally, don't be afraid to admit, that it's wonderful to be a girl.

While she talks about the benefits and opportunities of being a girl, Christians can go even further. We believe God is responsible for who we are and what we are. Each one of us is

created in God's image (Genesis 1:26). We can celebrate girls and boys and encourage them to use their gender and their gifts to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 1:31).

Notes

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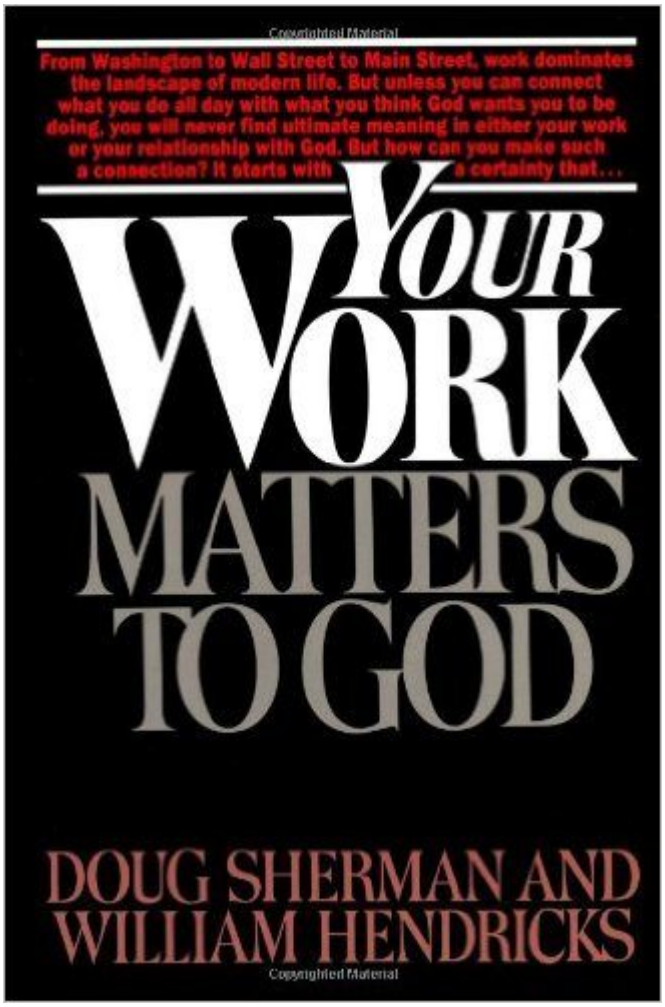
Your Work Matters to God

Sue Bohlin helps us look at work from a biblical perspective. If we apply a Christian worldview to our concept of work, it takes on greater significance within the kingdom of God.

This article is also available in Spanish.

Many Christians hold a decidedly unbiblical view of work. Some view it as a curse, or at least as part of the curse of living in a fallen world. Others make a false distinction between what they perceive as the sacred—serving God—and the secular—everything else. And others make it into an idol, expecting it to provide them with their identity and purpose in life as well as being a source of joy and fulfillment that only God can provide.



In their excellent book *Your Work Matters to God*,{1} Doug Sherman and William Hendricks expose the wrong ways of thinking about work, and explain how God invests work with intrinsic value and honor. Rick Warren echoes this idea in his blockbuster *The Purpose Driven Life* when he writes, "Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and perform it with an awareness of his presence."{2}

First, let's explore some faulty views of work: the secular view, some inappropriate hierarchies that affect how we view work, and work as merely a platform for doing evangelism.

Those who hold a secular view of work believe that life is divided into two disconnected parts. God is in one spiritual dimension and work is in the other *real* dimension, and the two have nothing to do with each other. God stays in His corner of the universe while I go to work and live my life, and these different realms never interact.

One problem with this secular view is that it sets us up for disappointment. If you leave God out of the picture, you'll have to get your sense of importance, fulfillment and reward from someplace else: work. Work is the answer to the question, "Who am I, and why am I important?" That is a very shaky foundation—because what happens if you lose your job? You're

suddenly a “nobody,” and you are not important because you are not employed.

The secular view of work tends to make an idol of career. Career becomes the number one priority in your life. Your relationship with God takes a back seat, family takes a back seat, even your relationship with other people takes a back seat to work. Everything gets filtered through the question, “What impact will this have on my career?”

The secular view of work leaves God out of the system. This is particularly unacceptable for Christians, because God calls us to make Him the center of our life.{3} He wants us to have a biblical worldview that weaves Him into every aspect of our lives, including work. He wants to be invited into our work; He wants to be Lord of our work.{4}

Inappropriate Hierarchies: Soul/Body, Temporal/Eternal

In this article, we’re examining some faulty views of work. One comes from believing that the soul matters more than the body. We can wrongly believe that God only cares about our soul, and our bodies don’t really matter. The body is not important, we can think: it is only temporal, and it will fade and die. But if that view were true, then why did God make a physical universe? Why did He put Adam and Eve in the garden to cultivate and keep it? He didn’t charge them with, “Go and make disciples of all nations which aren’t in existence yet, but they will be as soon as you guys go off and start making babies.” No, He said, “Here’s the garden, now cultivate it.” He gave them a job to do that had nothing to do with evangelism or church work. There is something important about our bodies, and God is honored by work that honors and cares for the body—which, after all, is His good creation.

Another wrong way of thinking is to value the eternal over the temporal so much that we believe *only* eternal things matter.

Some people believe that if you work for things that won't last into eternity—jobs like roofing and party planning and advertising—you're wasting your time. This wrong thinking needs to be countered by the truth that God created two sides to reality, the temporal and the eternal. The natural universe God made is very real, just as real as the supernatural universe. Asking which one is real and important is like asking which is real, our nine months in our mother's womb or life after birth? They are both real; they are both necessary. We have to go through one to get to the other.

Those things we do and make on earth DO have value, given the category they were made for: *time*. It's okay for things to have simply temporal value, since God chose for us to live in time before we live in eternity. Our work counts in both time and eternity because God is looking for faithfulness *now*, and the only way to demonstrate faithfulness is within this physical world. Spiritual needs are important, of course, but first physical needs need to be met. Try sharing the gospel with someone who hasn't eaten in three days! Some needs are temporal, and those needs must be met. So God equips people with abilities to meet the needs of His creation. In meeting the legitimate physical, temporal needs of people, our work serves people, and people have eternal value because God loves us and made us in His image.

The Sacred/Spiritual Dichotomy; Work as a Platform for Evangelism

Another faulty view of work comes from believing that spiritual, sacred things are far more important than physical, secular things. REAL work, people can think, is serving God in full-time Christian service, and then there's everything else running a very poor second. This can induce us to think either too highly of ourselves or too lowly of ourselves. We can think, "Real work is serving God, and then there's what others do" (which sets us up for condescension), or "Real work is

serving God, and then there's what I have to do" (which sets us up for false guilt and a sense of "missing it").

It's an improper way to view life as divided between the sacred and the secular. ALL of life relates to God and is sacred, whether we're making a business presentation or changing soiled diapers or leading someone to faith in Christ. It's unwise to think there are sacred things we do and there are secular things we do. It all depends on what's going on in our hearts. You can engage in what looks like holy activity like prayer and Bible study with a dark, self-centered, unforgiving spirit. Remember the Pharisees? And on the other hand, you can work at a job in a very secular atmosphere where the conversation is littered with profanity, the work is slipshod, the politics are wearisome, and yet like Daniel or Joseph in the Old Testament you can keep your own conversation pure and your behavior above reproach. You can bring honor and glory to God in a very worldly environment. God does not want us to do holy things, He wants us to be holy people.

A final faulty view of work sees it only as a platform for doing evangelism. If every interaction doesn't lead to an opportunity to share the gospel, one is a failure. Evangelism should be a priority, true, but not our *only* priority. Life is broader than evangelism. In Ephesians 1, Paul says three times that God made us, not for evangelism, but to live to the praise of His glory.{5} Instead of concentrating only on evangelism, we need to concentrate on living a life that honors God and loves people. That is far more winsome than all the evangelistic strategies in the world. Besides, if work is only a platform for evangelism, it devalues the work itself, and this view of work is too narrow and unfulfilling.

Next we'll examine at how God wants us to look at work. You might be quite surprised!

How God Wants Us to See Work

So far, we have discussed faulty views of work, but how does God want us to see it? Here's a startling thought: we actually work for God Himself! Consider Ephesians 6:5-8, which Paul writes to slaves but which we can apply to employees:

> Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, *as if you were serving the Lord, not men*, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

It's helpful to envision that behind every employer stands the Lord Jesus. He sees everything we do, and He appreciates it and will reward us, regardless of the type of work we do. I learned this lesson one day when I was cleaning the grungy bathtub of a family that wouldn't notice and would never acknowledge or thank me even if they did. I was getting madder by the minute, throwing myself a pity party, when the Lord broke into my thoughts. He quietly said, "I see you. And I appreciate what you're doing." Whoa! In an instant, that totally changed everything. Suddenly, I was able to do a menial job—and later on, more important ones—as a labor of love and worship for Jesus. I know He sees and appreciates what I do. It forever changed my view of work.

God also wants us to see that work is His gift to us. It is not a result of the Fall. God gave Adam and Eve the job of cultivating the garden and exercising dominion over the world *before* sin entered the world. We were created to work, and for work. Work is God's good gift to us!

Listen to what Solomon wrote:

> After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift![{6}]

Being happy in our work doesn't depend on the work, it depends on our attitude. To make the most of our job and be happy in our work is a gift God wants to give us!

Why Work is Good

In this article we're talking about how to think about work correctly. One question needs to be asked, though: Is all work equally valid? Well, no. All legitimate work is an extension of God's work of maintaining and providing for His creation. Legitimate work is work that contributes to what God wants done in the world and doesn't contribute to what He doesn't want done. So non-legitimate work would include jobs that are illegal, such as prostitution, drug dealing, and professional thieves. Then there are jobs that are legal, but still questionable in terms of ethics and morality, such as working in abortion clinics, pornography, and the gambling industry. These jobs are legal, but you have to ask, how are they cooperating with God to benefit His creation?

Work is God's gift to us. It is His provision in a number of ways. In *Your Work Matters to God*, the authors suggest five major reasons why work is valuable:

1. Through work we serve people. Most work is part of a huge network of interconnected jobs, industries, goods and services that work together to meet people's physical needs. Other jobs meet people's aesthetic and spiritual needs as well.

2. Through work we meet our own needs. Work allows us to exercise the gifts and abilities God gives each person, whether paid or unpaid. God expects adults to provide for themselves and not mooch off others. Scripture says, “If one will not work, neither let him eat!”{7}

3. Through work we meet our family’s needs. God expects the heads of households to provide for their families. He says, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”{8}

4. Through work we earn money to give to others. In both the Old and New Testaments, God tells us to be generous in meeting the needs of the poor and those who minister to us spiritually. {9}

5. Through work we love God. One of God’s love languages is obedience. When we work, we are obeying His two great commandments to love Him and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.{10} We love God by obeying Him from the heart. We love our neighbor as we serve other people through our work.

We bring glory to God by working industriously, demonstrating what He is like, and serving others by cooperating with God to meet their needs. In serving others, we serve God. And that’s why our work matters to God.

Notes

1. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God.* Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987.
2. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. p. 67.
3. Philippians 1:21
4. Romans 12:1, 2
5. Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14
6. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19, The Message.
7. 2 Thess. 3:10

8. 1 Tim. 5:8
9. Leviticus 19:10—Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. Ephesians 4:28—Let him who steals, steal no longer but rather let him labor performing with his own hands what is good in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. Gal 6:6—The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.
10. Matthew 22:37-39

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Cohabitation and Living Together – A Biblical, Christian Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson takes a hard look from a biblical perspective at a common practice among Americans, cohabitation. Not only does he find it counter to biblical instruction for Christians, he finds that living together in a sexual relationship reduces the probability of a long-lasting marriage later on.

The original version of this updated article is also available in Spanish.

More than twenty years ago, I did a week of radio programs on cohabitation and cited a study done by the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University. Sociologists David Popenoe and

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead came to this conclusion: “Cohabitation is replacing marriage as the first living together experience for young men and women.”{1}

What was true then is true today, but there is even more evidence of changing attitudes as well as additional social research on cohabitation. A survey by Pew Research asked American adults when it was acceptable to live together. Two thirds (69%) said it was acceptable “even if they don’t plan to get married.” Another 16 percent said it was acceptable “only if they planned to get married.” Only 14 percent said it was “never acceptable.”

That may explain why living together has gone from rare to routine in the secular world, but also explains why so many Christian couples also see living together as acceptable. In the 1960s and 1970s, only about a half million were living together. One study from a few years ago, estimated that over 18 million Americans were cohabiting, and nearly a quarter of them were people over the age of 50 years old.{2}

Another reason to revisit the social phenomenon of cohabitation is to remind couples that the “premarital cohabitation effect” still exists. The effect is the research finding from decades ago that living together before marriage increases your likelihood of marital struggles and even divorce. Scott Stanley with the Institute for Family Studies acknowledges that it may be counterintuitive “that living together would not improve one’s odds for a successful marriage. And yet, whatever else is true, there is scant evidence to support this believe in a positive effect.”{3} We will look at the latest research data below.

Since such a high percentage of American adults believe it is acceptable for an unmarried couple to live together, they have developed new legal documents to establish financial and medical obligations to one another. Several cohabiting couples

will draft a cohabitation agreement.{4} Such an agreement supposedly ensures certain rights or obligations in the relationship that would typically be legally conferred upon marriage.

Although some people will say that a cohabiting couple is "married in the eyes of God," that is not true. They are not married in God's eyes because they are living contrary to biblical statements about marriage. And they are not married in their own eyes because they have specifically decided *not* to marry.

Cohabitation is without a doubt changing the cultural landscape of our society. That is why we look at the social, psychological, and biblical aspects of cohabitation in this article.

Test-drive Relationships and Other Myths

No doubt you have heard couples justify cohabitation by arguing that they need to live together before marriage to see if they were compatible. First, that argument does not justify cohabitation. Second, it is fallacious since so many couples living together never plan to get married.

Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher wrote *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*.{5} It not only makes the case for marriage; it also challenges contemporary assumptions about cohabitation.

The thesis of the book is simple. Back in the 1950s, the rules were clear: first love, next marriage, and only then the baby carriage. But the social tsunami of the 1960s changed everything. The Pill, the sexual revolution, feminism, mothers in the workplace, no-fault divorce, and the rise of illegitimate births changed our views of marriage and family. The authors marshal the evidence to show that marriage is a good thing. As the subtitle says, married people are happier,

healthier, and better off financially.

Nevertheless, the conventional wisdom is that you should “try before you buy.” In fact, one of the oft-repeated questions justifying living together is: “You wouldn’t buy a car without a test-drive, would you?”

The problem with such questions and slogans is they dehumanize the other person. If I decide not to buy a car, the car doesn’t feel rejected. When you test-drive your car, you don’t pack your personal luggage in the trunk. And rejecting a car model doesn’t bring emotional baggage into the next test-driving experience. The car doesn’t need psychological counseling so that it can trust the next car buyer. Frankly, test-driving a relationship is only positive if you are the driver.

Research has shown that those who cohabit tend to view marriage negatively because it involved the assumption of new responsibilities that contrasted with their former freedoms. On the other hand, those marrying through the conventional route of dating and courtship did not feel constrained by marriage but liberated by marriage.

Consider the contrast. A couple living together has nearly everything marriage has to offer (including sex) but few commitments or responsibilities. So, cohabiting people feel trapped when they enter marriage. They must assume huge new responsibilities while getting nothing they didn’t already have.

Couples entering marriage through dating and courtship experience just the opposite, especially if they maintain their sexual purity. Marriage is the culmination of their relationship and provides the full depth of a relationship they have long anticipated.

This is not to say that cohabitation guarantees marital failure nor that marriage through the conventional route

guarantees marital success. There are exceptions to this rule, but a couple who live together before marriage stack the odds against themselves and their future marriage.

Cohabitation and Perceptions

Although cohabitation is becoming popular in America, sociologists studying the phenomenon warned that living together before marriage, puts your future marriage in danger. That was the conclusion of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University done by sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead.{6}

They found that cohabiting appears to be so counterproductive to long-lasting marriage that unmarried couples should avoid living together, especially if it involves children. They argue that living together is "a fragile family form" that poses increased risk to women and children.

Part of the reason for the danger is the difference in perception. Men often enter the relationship with less intention to marry than do women. They may regard it more as a sexual opportunity without the ties of long-term commitment. Women, however, often see the living arrangement as a step toward eventual marriage. While the women may believe they are headed for marriage, the man often has other ideas. Some men resent the women they live with and view them as easy. Such a woman is not his idea of a faithful marriage partner.

People who live together in uncommitted relationships may be unwilling to work out problems. Since there is no long-term commitment, often it is easy to leave the current living arrangement and seek less fractious relationships with a new partner.

In recent years, there has been the occasional study that suggests there are no significant problems for couples if they live together. But Scott Stanley of the Institute for Family

Studies dismisses those few studies because they fail to consider long-term problems. And he points to another recent study that does show an increased risk for divorce among those living together before marriage.{7}

The significant increase in cohabitation in the last few decades is staggering. The reasons for the growth are many: fewer taboos against premarital sex, earlier sexual maturity, later marriage, adequate income to live apart from their families.

Whatever the reasons for cohabiting, this study documents the dangers. Couples who live together are more likely to divorce than those who don't. They are less happy and score lower on well-being indices, including sexual satisfaction. And cohabiting couples are often poorer than married couples.

Even if millions are doing it, living together is a bad idea. As we will see below, there are clear biblical prohibitions against premarital sex. But apart from these biblical pronouncements are the ominous sociological predictions of failure when a couple considers cohabitation rather than marriage. The latest research backs up what the Bible has said for millennia. If you want a good marriage, don't do what society says. Do what the Bible teaches us to do.

Consequences of Cohabitation

Contrary to conventional wisdom, cohabitation can be harmful to marriage as well as to the couples and their children. One study based on the National Survey of Families and Households found that marriages which had prior cohabitors were 46 percent more likely to divorce than marriages of non-cohabitors. The authors concluded from this study and from a review of previous studies that the risk of marital disruption following cohabitation "is beginning to take on the status of an empirical generalization."{8}

Some have tried to argue that the correlation between cohabitation and divorce is artificial since people willing to cohabit are more unconventional and less committed to marriage. In other words, cohabitation doesn't cause divorce but is merely associated with it because the same type of people are involved in both phenomena. Yet, even when this "selection effect" is carefully controlled statistically, a "cohabitation effect" remains.

Marriages are held together by a common commitment which is absent in most, if not all, cohabiting relationships. Partners who live together value autonomy over commitment and tend not to be as committed as married couples in their dedication to the continuation of the relationship.{9}

One study found that "living with a romantic partner prior to marriage was associated with more negative and less positive problem-solving support and behavior during marriage." The reason is simple. Since there is less certainty of a long-term commitment, "there may be less motivation for cohabiting partners to develop their conflict resolution and support skills."{10}

Couples living together, however, miss out on more than just the benefits of marriage. Annual rates of depression among cohabiting couples are more than three times higher than they are among married couples.{11} Those who cohabit are much more likely to be unhappy in marriage and much more likely to think about divorce.{12}

Cohabitation is especially harmful to children. First, several studies have found that children currently living with a mother and her unmarried partner have significantly more behavior problems and lower academic performance than children in intact families.{13} Second, there is the risk that the couple will break up, creating even more social and personal difficulties. Third, many of these children were not born in the present union but in a previous union of one of the adult

partners (usually the mother). Living in a house with a mother and an unmarried boyfriend is tenuous at best.

These studies, along with others, suggest that cohabitation is less secure, less fulfilling, and even potentially more harmful than traditional marriage.

Cohabitation and the Bible

God designed sexual intimacy to occur exclusively within the sacred commitment of marriage (Genesis 2:21-24). When we trust God's design, we can honor marriage as we are commanded in Hebrews 13:4.

The Bible teaches that the act of sexual intercourse can have a strong bonding effect on two people. When done within the bounds of marriage, the man and the woman become one flesh. Ephesian 5:31 says: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."

Sexual intercourse outside of marriage also has consequences. Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul said that when a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her (1 Corinthians 6:16). The context of the discussion arose from a problem within the church. A man in the church was having sexual relations with his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5:1-3). Paul calls this relationship sinful. In 1 Corinthians 6:18 he says we are to flee sexual immorality.

Sexual immorality is condemned in about 25 passages in the New Testament. The Greek word is *porneia*, a word which includes all forms of illicit sexual intercourse. Jesus taught in Mark 7:21-23: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean."

Paul taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5: "It is God's will that

you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God."

Marriage is God's plan. Marriage provides intimate companionship for life (Genesis 2:18). It provides a context for the procreation and nurture of children (Ephesians 6:1-2). And finally, marriage provides a godly outlet for sexual desire (1 Corinthians 7:2).

In the New Testament, believers are warned against persistent sin, including sexual sin (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). The church is to keep believers accountable for their behavior. Believers are to judge themselves, lest they fall into God's hands (1 Corinthians11:31-32). Sexual sin should not even be named among believers (Ephesians 5:3).

Living together outside of marriage not only violates biblical commands but it puts a couple and their future marriage at risk. In this article, I have collected several sobering statistics about the impact cohabitation can have on you and your relationship. If you want a good marriage, don't do what society says. Do what the Bible teaches us to do.

Notes

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2. Patricia Reaney, "More Americans 50 Years and Over are Cohabiting, Research Shows," Reuters, April 6, 2017, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-cohabitation/more-americans-50-years-and-over-are-cohabiting-research-shows-idUSKBN1782RI
3. Scott Stanley, "Premarital Cohabitation Is Still Associated

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4. money.usnews.com/money/personal-finance/family-finance/articles/what-is-a-cohabitation-agreement
5. Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially* (New York: Random House, 2000).
6. David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The National Marriage Project*, January 1999.
7. Scott Stanley, "Premarital Cohabitation," *Institute for Family Studies*, October 17, 2018
8. Alfred DeMaris and K. Vaninadha Rao, "Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability in the United States: A Reassessment," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 54(1992), 178-190.
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12. Andrew Greeley, *Faithful Attraction* (New York: Tom Doherty, 1991), 206.
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Additional Resources

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Jeff Van Goethem, *Living Together: A Guide to Counseling Unmarried Couples*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004.

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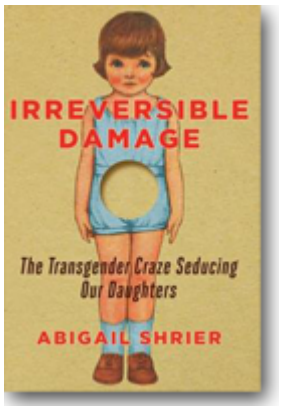
[This article is an updated version of Kerby's 2003 transcript titled "Cohabitation."]

Transgenderism

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of the transgender craze that has taken over the western world in the past ten years, drawing on startling insights from Abigail Shrier and Ryan Anderson.

Transgenderism is the belief that people have a "gender identity" that is distinct from their sex. If they feel there is a conflict between their gender and their sex, gender identity should take precedence. Although a very small fraction of the population may experience gender dysphoria, the current percentage of Americans identifying as transgender or nonbinary has exploded.

Gender Dysphoria Research



Abigail Shrier wrote about the transgender craze in her book *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*. When she joined me on my Point of View radio program, she explained that "gender dysphoria" was characterized by severe and persistent discomfort in one's biological sex. It typically begins in early childhood. In previous generations, it afflicted a sliver of the population (roughly .01 percent) and occurred mostly in boys.

Prior to 2012, there was no scientific literature on girls (11-21) ever having developed gender dysphoria at all. Then the Western world experienced a sudden surge of adolescents claiming to have gender dysphoria and self-identifying as "transgender."

In 2016, Lisa Littman (an ob-gyn, public health researcher) was scrolling through social media when she noticed a statistical peculiarity. Several adolescents (most of them girls) from a small town in Rhode Island had come out as transgender. In fact, they were all from the same friend group.

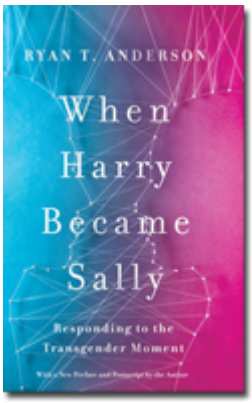
She admitted that she knew very little about gender dysphoria, but this statistical anomaly was interesting to her. And she then noticed there had been a sudden spike in the western world of girls experiencing gender dysphoria. She immersed herself in the scientific literature on gender dysphoria to try to understand what was happening. Perhaps it was due to increased social acceptance of LGBTQ people, but she suggested in a peer-reviewed paper that the girls might be rushing toward "transition" because of peer contagion. As you might imagine, her suggestion was roundly criticized. She was also accused of anti-trans bigotry.

In a subsequent research project, she collected data anonymously from 256 parents whose kids had not met the

criteria of gender dysphoria in childhood, but suddenly identified as transgender in adolescence. She identified 16 traits in common. Here are a few.

- The vast majority have zero indicators of childhood gender dysphoria.
- Almost a third of them did not seem at all gender dysphoric.
- A majority had one or more psychiatric diagnosis and almost half were engaged in self-harm prior to the onset of dysphoria.
- Nearly 70 percent of the teenagers belonged to a peer group in which at least one friend had also come out as transgender.
- Among parents who knew their children's social status, over 60 percent said the announcement brought a popularity boost.
- Over 88 percent of the parents surveyed reported being supportive of transgender rights.

How to Respond to the Transgender Moment



Ryan Anderson is the author of the book, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*. He explains how transgender ideology promotes the opportunity for children to change their gender with surgery and drugs. And parents "are told that puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones may be the only way to prevent their children from committing suicide."

Ryan Anderson countered that the best studies of gender dysphoria have found "that between 80 and 95 percent of children who express a discordant gender identity will come to identify with their bodily sex if natural development is

allowed to proceed." He also documented that even children going through "transitioning" treatment still have an extraordinarily high rate of suicide attempts compared to the general population.

He reminded us that we should be tolerant and loving toward children (and adults) who struggle with their gender identity. But we should also be aware of the potential harm when transgender identity is normalized.

Unfortunately, we are living in a world where transgender activists want more than tolerance and kindness. They demand affirmation. We aren't allowed to question whether using medical treatments to aid in transgender transformation is positive for children. In his book, Ryan Anderson shows that the best biology, psychology, and philosophy support an understanding of sex as a bodily reality. As he puts it: "Biology isn't bigotry."

Abigail Shrier also offers several suggestions. **First, don't get your kid a smartphone**. She explains that nearly every problem teenagers face traces itself back to the introduction of the smartphone years ago.

Second, don't relinquish your authority as a parent. You don't have to go along with every idea your teenager has, nor do you have to go along with every educational or psychological fad being promoted in society.

Third, don't support gender ideology in your child's education. She provides an example of what happens when schools do a seminar on anorexia or suicide. Often the prevalence increases. A small number of students may have gender confusion or gender dysphoria. But talking about it will spread confusion.

Finally, don't be afraid to admit that it's wonderful to be a girl.

While she talks about the benefits and opportunities of being a girl, Christians can go even further. We believe God is responsible for who we are and what we are. Each one of us is created in God's image (Genesis 1:26). We can celebrate girls and boys and encourage them to use their gender and their gifts to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 1:31).

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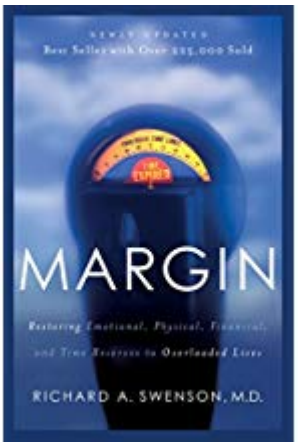
Margin: Space Between Ourselves and Our Limits

Margin is "The space that once existed between ourselves and our limits." When we reach the limits of our resources and abilities, we are out of margin. Former Probe staffer Lou Whitworth reviews a very important book by Dr. Richard Swenson, Margin: How to Create the Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves You Need.

The Problem with Progress

Until very recently most Americans had a blind faith in progress; we acknowledged that modern life brought problems but considered that such were inevitable and could be dealt with and eventually overcome. Over the past few years, however, discerning people have begun to ask, "What went wrong? With all the advancements we have made, life should be better. Instead, many aspects of our lives are worse than they were just a few years ago. What happened?"



In this article we are looking at a very important book by Richard A. Swenson, a medical doctor. The book is *Margin: How to Create the Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves You Need*. Dr. Swenson's thesis is that though scientific progress benefits us in numerous ways, it also brings with it inevitable pains that must be ruthlessly resisted if one is to live a balanced life, and especially a life that reflects Christian values/virtues.

Margin is "the space that once existed between ourselves and our limits." When we reach the limits of our resources and abilities, we are out of margin. Progress, contrary to our expectations, is like Pacman; it incessantly eats up margin. Progress and margin are often opposing forces.

The author recognizes the pains of the past and acknowledges that life for previous generations was no picnic. Nevertheless, he amply illustrates the staggering number of challenges facing contemporary mankind, challenges that have no precedent in human history. The pace of modern life has been steamrolled by progress.

Many have resisted the notion that life in the waning years of the 20th century was unusually painful and stressful. After all, didn't our history teach us of those intrepid men and women who crossed oceans and braved the harsh winters of the new world to have personal and religious freedom? Shouldn't we be ashamed to complain about the stress in our lives when brave pioneer men, and their even braver wives, piled their children and all their belongings into covered wagons and headed west across unknown and unforgiving lands surrounded by potentially hostile Indians? Did not our fathers win World War II? After 50 years of strife and struggle and staring eyeball to eyeball with Russia, didn't America finally face down the threat of world dominion by implacable, godless communism?

Where then do we get off saying that life today is hard and stressful?

As Swenson clearly points out, without minimizing the horrors of the past, modern progress brings problems never before faced by mankind. Some of our problems are very different from those of the past perhaps, but they are real, formidable problems just the same. For example, a partial list of problems would include the speed of travel, the power of computers, levels of litigation, pervasiveness of the media, specialization, business layoffs, indebtedness, vulnerability to terrorism, spiraling medical costs, AIDS, numbers of teen mothers and illegitimate births, aging population, overcrowded prisons, environmental pollution, overcrowding, traffic congestion, prevalence of divorce, disintegration of the family, drugs, prevalence of sexual diseases, complexity at all levels, and on and on the list could go. Never before have we had to face problems of this – and certainly we have never before had to face them all at the same time.

As Swenson writes, "Each item has played a significant role in making our era different from all those that preceded it. And when we factor in the interrelatedness of issues, the dimensions involved, and the speed of change, then unprecedented become too mild a word."

The Pain of Life Without Boundaries

In his book *Margin*, Dr. Swenson says that our problems have no precedent because of the rate of change. In the past we faced a slightly upward pattern of linear change; now we are looking at a skyrocketing pattern of exponential change in practically every area of life. Yet most of us still think and live with a linear mind-set. Suddenly we are encountering limits in our time, energy, health, finances, ability to concentrate, to care, to even feel. Minds, bodies, systems, plans that were adequate on a linear timescale may self-destruct at warp

speed. We are perilously close to burnout. We hope beyond hope that things will level out and slow down, but even if that happens, much that makes life worthwhile and manageable will be destroyed in the meantime.

Examples abound of life without natural boundaries. Once it was a given that the night was for sleeping, and the day was for work. Now a hundred years after the electric light bulb, whole cities never sleep. Sunday was once a day of rest; nearly everyone had one day off from work. Now the boundaries between work and play and home and the office are so confused some people can never relax or let down. A few years back we might have known someone who had borne a child out of wedlock, been divorced, had emotional problems, or gone bankrupt, but today we are in an epidemic of such problems.

Swenson asks, “Is there a critical mass of problems beyond which a society—or, for that matter, an individual—will be destroyed no matter how wonderful the benefits it enjoys? If so, what is that critical mass? Are we approaching it? Have we reached it?” He answers, Yes, there is a point of critical mass; what that point is we don’t know, but clearly we are approaching it. He says it remains to be seem whether we have already reached it. As George Gallup wrote, “I’ve come to feel a deep sense of urgency about the Future Forces at work today. . . . If swift, forceful steps aren’t taken to defuse the political and social time bombs facing us, we may well find ourselves on a track that could lead to the destruction of civilization as we know it.”

It is critical to note here that progress has brought man much power— power that can be used for good or for evil. The sobering truth, then, is that the power to do evil advances exponentially, and modern secular man is not known for restraint nor does he recognize his fallenness and the danger it holds for himself and all humanity.

We have benefited from progress in two main areas. First, we

have seen positive gains in medicine, technology, and in our standard of living and material well being. Second, our intellectual and educational opportunities have expanded enormously, and knowledge and information are increasing with unimagined speed.

The pain that progress has brought us is evident in three areas. First, we have lost ground in the social sphere as pressures have increased on all relationships: family, friendships, neighborhoods, community spirit, and church life. Second, we are often emotionally drained, stressed, angry, isolated, and frequently unfulfilled and don't know what to do about these problems. Third, we are spiritually weakened by the pace of life, the lack of community, lack of time and energy to cultivate our relationship with God and with our fellow man. This, Dr. Swenson says, is the price we have paid for progress.

The Problem of Stress

Because of the unprecedented level of problems today people live with very high levels of stress. Stress is "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it." Note that stress is not the circumstance but the response to the circumstance.

We normally think of such a crisis as the "fight or flight" reaction which pumps adrenaline into our system, makes us stronger and more alert, etc. If these responses are occasional there is little harm done, but if triggered too often or if "stuck" in a constant state of anger, rage, anxiety, fear, or frustration, we begin to overdose on our own adrenaline. This can bring about irreversible damage to the body and set it up for heart attack, stroke, cancer, etc.

Our stress levels are unprecedented. One reason is that most of us today experience constant mental strain without the offsetting benefits of strenuous physical work. When, for

example, the commercial property deal we've worked on for months falls through, or the accounts don't balance, or the computer just won't cooperate, there is no place to run and no one to hit. We just have to try again. The physical laborer, even if he has some mental strain, still has the labor to drain off his adrenaline, and he usually has the ability to think about other things occasionally as he works.

Closely related to stress is overload; in fact, overload is a primary cause of stress. Our culture adds detail on top of detail; one more choice, one more option, one more change, and the details never end. "We must now deal with more 'things per person' than at any other time in history. Yet one can comfortably handle only so many details in his or her life. Exceeding this threshold will result in disorganization or frustration. . . . The problem is not in the 'details.' The problem is in the 'exceeding.' This is called overloading."

The facts are that there are physical limits and man has performance limits, emotional limits, and mental limits. The work load a twenty-five year old athletic, single man can carry may differ greatly from the load a fifty-five year old man can carry if the latter has two teenage children and two children in college, dependent parents, and a wife in menopause. When such overload occurs, the person may experience anxiety, have a physical or nervous breakdown, exhibit hostility, slip into depression, or become bitter and resentful.

We are overloaded with activities, change, choices, commitments, competition, debt, decisions, education, expectations, fatigue, hurry, information, media, ministry, noise, people, pollution, possessions, problems, technology, traffic, waste, and work.

So why do we overload? First, we are usually unaware of our overload until it's too late. Second, some people are too conscientious. Third, others get overloaded because their

bosses are driven people who overload their employees. Generally people don't intend to go down the path to overload; they just think that "one more thing won't hurt." But if they are at or near overload, it will hurt.

As the author says, learning "to accept the finality and non-negotiability of the twenty-four hour day" will help us avoid overload and excessive stress.

Building Margin into our Lives

Of all the areas in which we need margin, having adequate emotional energy is the most important because with emotional margin one can work to gain the other margins.

The amount of emotional energy we have is finite and must not be squandered. Though it is difficult to measure and quantify we must not be embarrassed to admit to ourselves or to others when our emotional reservoir is low. Then we need to replenish our emotional reserves for the good of others and ourselves.

Restoring emotional margin is aided by cultivating our social and family support network. Serving others or doing volunteer work is proven to enhance and lengthen life. Extending forgiveness and reconciling relationships can stop the negative drain on our emotional stores. Cultivating a spirit of gratitude, a hopeful outlook, and love for God and our fellow human beings is energizing, whereas their opposites are negative and debilitating. Finally, establishing appropriate limits and boundaries will help in maintaining emotional reserves.

Dr. Swenson's recommendations for gaining a margin in physical energy are fairly routine to the knowledgeable reader, but he puts particular stress on the need for the need for rest and sleep. The need for correction is clear since America has now become a 24-hour society: many of our cities never sleep and many businesses never close. People of all types, college

students, policemen, nurses, taxi drivers, shift workers, and mothers of young children, may go long periods without a good night's sleep. Such people push (or are pushed) to their limits during the day and push on into or through the night. Sleep disorders plague more than 50 million of us; in fact, sleep deprivation "has become one of the most pervasive problems facing the U.S." Unfortunately the ability to go without sleep is sometimes a matter of pride for some, but sleep and rest are God's ideas, and we should not be ashamed of our need for both. The author gives several helpful suggestions on making sleep more natural and effective.

Dr. Swenson strongly stresses the need for all types of physical exercise, but says that aerobic exercise for the heart "will do more to establish margin in physical energy" than anything else. He endorses exercise not only for its physical benefits but also for its emotional and mental benefits.

When the subject turns to time the author writes, "The spontaneous flow of progress is to consume more of our time, not less . . . to consume more of our margin, not less." He adds that for "every hour progress saves by organizing and technologizing our time, it consumes two more hours through the consequences, direct or indirect, of this activity."

Clearly time becomes a problem for a society like ours. Some the author's suggestions for countering the time crunch are countercultural and tough to implement, but then continuing on in the same direction most of us are going is difficult as well. He suggests practicing saying "No," turning off the television, practicing simplicity, and getting less done but doing the right things. Many of us need to make some thoughtful and hard choices.

The author's suggestions for gaining a margin in time are preceded with a reminder that of the ten top stressors of family life, four have to do with insufficient time:

insufficient couple time, “me” time, family play time, and overscheduled family calendars.

Why do we need to prune our time wasters? Because time is for people and relationships, subjects very dear to God.

A Plan of Action

There are many ways we can spend our time. We could follow the “Excellence” gurus and pour all our energy into one part of our lives. We would probably have no extra margin since other parts of our lives had been sacrificed and in a condition of “negative excellence.”

At some point, all things being equal, we would become quite accomplished in a given area. The end result, however, might be similar to having one magnificently developed right arm attached to puny, stooped shoulders, a scrawny left arm, and skinny, weak legs. This is like the person who is a powerhouse in his professional life and a dwarf in his relationships.

Dr. Richard Swenson suggests a different way in his book *Margin*. He suggests an approach to life that neglects no important area. He suggests being willing to sacrifice excellence in one or two areas in order that no area be in a condition of negative excellence. This would be similar to the athlete who is toned and conditioned all over, but not overly developed in any one area.

A similar balance in our lives will increase our emotional margin because we and and our families will be happier.

Simplicity has much to offer harried twentieth-century man. But it isn’t easy. It takes effort to discard the superfluous and concentrate on the core elements of life. There has always been an attraction to simplicity; the difficulty has been in achieving it. The simple life the author calls us to is not so much to escape modern life as to transcend it.

Envy is the enemy of contentment and form of self-inflicted torture. Yet because envy is the chief ingredient of advertising and the mainspring of political and social movements, it is difficult for many to see its destructiveness. We need to follow Paul who learned contentment in whatever circumstance he found himself (Phil. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 6:6-10). The practice of contentment brings margin into our lives.

The pain that progress has brought us is mostly in the area of our emotions, our relationships, and our spiritual natures. What are some additional steps start dealing with the pain and achieving some margin?

First, thank God for the pain. The pain pointed out that something is wrong. Second, repent in a way that leads to permanent, tangible change. Third, prune activities and habits that waste time, sap energy, and stifle relationships. Fourth, cooperate with God. Bathe plans in prayer and leave wiggle room for yourself, your family, and people God may send your way.

- How did we relate to God?
- How did we relate to ourselves?
- How did we relate to others?

The road to health and blessing in the path of relationship. Love and relationships are hard work, and sometimes costly because superfluous, unimportant things may need to be put aside, but the payoff is happiness, contentment, peace, and margin. I hope some of the things we have shared in this article turn you from the path of overload and start you down the path of margin.

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Confessions of a Missionary Addicted to Porn

Paul Rutherford explains the lies he believed and to which he was in bondage about pornography, until Jesus helped him achieve sexual sobriety.

Introduction—But Really, a Prologue. A Really Important Prologue.

Internet pornography use is ubiquitous. The metric you use to support that statement doesn't seem to matter: percent of internet users who consume it, number of bits of data flowing through the Internet, or even cash currency. It is a huge business. And the internet distributes pornography at levels historically unprecedented. It quickly became easy to access, cheap to acquire, and anonymous to consume.

I am myself no stranger to the consumption of internet pornography. To be clear, consuming pornographic material is not appropriate for a believer in Jesus Christ. Our website has more information on this. But I don't think that principle needs repeating; my older brothers in the faith have been very clear about that.

In this article I want to share with you some insights the Lord has taught me through my struggle to be free of an addiction to internet pornography. I will be frank. And rather than condemning you for your sin (the enemy does a plenty good job at that), I will address a number of beliefs you may find you hold, even if unwittingly. Then you'll see how those beliefs do not reflect reality—they are all a lie.

I Like Porn Because It's Easy

My name is Paul, and I am a missionary. In the late 2000's the Lord made plain to me that I was no longer dabbling with internet pornography, it had become my master. I was addicted, and I needed help.

By God's grace I found help through a group recovery program at a local church. I later placed membership there, and have found freedom from this life-sucking addiction. Still, I carry the wounds inflicted by my choices years ago. The balm of Christ has healed them. I'm walking today in the freedom only forgiveness from the Father can provide. By God's grace I have a beautiful wife, a blessed marriage, and three wonderful children.

Hindsight, though, is 20/20, and while I must be vigilant every day to guard against temptation, time and space have provided me perspective to gain clarity on the beliefs that got me into my addiction in the first place and kept me down for some time. I've since come to realize there were five lies in particular that I was believing. Let me share them with you, along with the truth that will set you free.

The first reason I love porn is because it is easy. It is easy to access, yes—as easy to access as turning on my smart phone. Years ago it was far more difficult to acquire. Now I carry temptation in my pocket! How dangerous! Only by God's grace am I sober from porn today.

When I say I love porn because it's easy, what I mean is it's easily to get what I want from sex without all the hard work. Pursuing my wife is hard work. Empathy is not easily mustered. Emotional intimacy with her is no easy task. Pornography on the other hand, is just a tap away. If all I'm looking for is that release, surely porn is a better choice because it's an

easier route. Same destination, right? No harm no foul. Right?

Wrong.

Nope. Not true. Pornography is in fact NOT easy because it circumvents God's good plan for sex.

Pornography only seems to be easy. That is just an appearance. Ultimately porn complicates my life. Confessing relapse to my wife? Not easy. Confessing lust to my small group and others? Difficult. The wound I inflicted on my wife by spiritually cheating on her? Not easy for her. The months of work required to earn back her trust? Not easy.

The ease of pornography is a lie. The truth is, it complicates my life and makes it harder. If you are tied up in it, please confess it to the Lord today, and confess it to another human being. The first step to getting better is simple. Admit you have a problem.

I Like Porn Because It's Fast

I love pornography because it's fast. I get pleasure fast. I get satisfaction quickly. I get what I want, and I get it now. Sound familiar? It's not unlike that famous song lyric from the 70's, "Wham bam, thank you, ma'am."

What I love about pornography is that it gives me what I want, and it gives it to me fast. No waiting involved. No patience required. Faster is better. Isn't it? Why rent the "Eight Minute Abs" workout VHS from the local video store, when "Seven Minute Abs" is on the shelf right next to it? (As referenced from the 90s film *Tommy Boy* starring Chris Farley.)

What I love about pornography is how it satisfies quickly. Pornography only asks for a few minutes of my time and then gives me what I want.

Do you know how long it takes to pursue my wife? It took

months to get to know her when we were dating. It took months to plan, prepare, then execute our wedding. Now that we're married, do you know how long it takes to pursue her, so that she feels close to me, intimately and emotionally connected? That takes a LOT longer than the time required to log on to the internet.

The problem with loving pornography because it's fast, is that eventually it isn't. The truth is pornography has sapped years from my life.

There was a season I was a casual user of pornography, and on a fine spring afternoon, I finished up work early for the day and looked forward to what adventures I might pursue with the remainder of that evening. By the time I went to bed that night, I'd wasted hours of my life consuming internet pornography.

The problem with pornography is that it *is* fast, until it requires hours of your life you would rather have spent otherwise. Furthermore, this trend continued for months, even years!

Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." The fast pleasure of pornography seemed to me like the right way in the moment. Now I realize it is the way to death—death of my relationship with the Lord because sin separates me from Him; it is death to intimacy with my wife; death to time and energy that could have been better spend elsewhere doing things other than pornography itself.

The death I experienced led to so much loss because of the work required in my relationships to clean up the mess of my sin. It was a process over several years. I loved pornography initially because it was fast. it's not, and it's not worth it!

I Like Porn Because I’m in Charge

The third reason I love pornography is because I am in charge. I get what I want and risk nothing in return. I remain in control. I give up nothing. I risk nothing. It’s everything a man-fearing, people-pleaser could ask for. Except that’s not the true identity for a believer in Jesus Christ. And if you identify with Christ, then this applies to you.

Pornography is great because I remain in charge. I have control. That whole fear of rejection thing is not a problem. Since I’m not entering into a real relationship with a real person, I’m not taking any of those risks. I don’t have to reveal anything about myself. I don’t even have to give my name. I don’t have to share my anxieties, my fears, or my dreams. I don’t have to share anything.

With porn, I don’t have to admit that I’m human in any way. And this appeal is strong for those of us who are cowards. And I am one. Since I fear rejection—and porn never risks rejection—it gives the false illusion of security. It’s a lie.

Sadly, this means what I love about pornography is how it enables my cowardice.

This has no place for the genuine Christ-follower.

If you have taken a wife, you are called to love that woman as Christ has loved His Church. Jesus Christ is the paragon of courage, bravery, and vulnerability. If you are a husband, then the standard by which to compare yourself as a husband is not to your neighbor but to Christ Himself. That is a high call, friend—much higher than you or I are accustomed to, I’m afraid.

I like pornography because I feel like I’m in charge. But that is a lie. Being strung out, addicted to pornography, shows that you definitely are not in charge. It’s a farce. It’s a lie.

The truth is I have far less control than I desire. When it come to my wife's opinion of me, I have no control. Zero. I have a lot of influence, but no control. That's the risk inherent to the job of husbanding a wife. That's the risk inherent in marriage.

Marital love is a self-giving love. As Jesus died to love His bride when she was in sin, so you too, husband, are called to love your bride even if you are in fact right, and she is in fact wrong. Love her anyway. Love her always. It will require you to take risks. But it's ok. Those risks are good—both for you, your wife, your family, and the family of God.

I Like Porn Because I Get What I Want

The fourth reason I love porn is because I get what I want. That's what we all want, isn't it? We want what we want, and we want it now. That somehow seems like America's motto these days. Give me what I want but don't make me work for it. Capitalism does have some downsides.

In moments of temptation all I feel is my desire for gratification. I've learned from years now of recovery that I rationalize the pursuit of fulfilling this temptation by telling myself how good I've been, how many good things I've done, or perhaps with how much I've sacrificed to do the right thing.

If you can't tell already, the problem with this reason is that it is purely selfish. It's the definition of immaturity. You want what you want, and you don't care who you hurt to get it—be that your spouse, the Lord, your community, your children, or even yourself.

The Bible calls this "gratification of the flesh." In Ephesians 2:1-3 the author, Paul, admits that all believers in Jesus once lived this way, giving into the desires and inclinations of our sinful flesh. Insisting on getting what I

want is sin.

The worst part is that I wasn't actually getting what I wanted. That too was a lie. My flesh was merely chasing that fleeting feeling. The truth is, I have a God-given desire for the feeling, but also so much more: a desire for connection to another person, a desire to belong, a desire for intimacy—the thrill of knowing another and being known by another.

Porn never delivers any of these. Porn delivers emptiness, isolation, and disappointment. Marriage, on the other hand, delivers intimacy, satisfaction, and as a bonus, sanctification. This was God's intent from the beginning. You can also have this today if you are married. And it is God's will for you to find all your healthy sexual desire to be fulfilled by your spouse. It *can* happen. There *is* hope, and it is in Christ.

Don't believe the lie that porn will give you what you want. It's a bill of goods. Learn from my mistakes, please. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." (Proverbs 14:12)

I Like Porn Because It's Cheap

The fifth and last reason I will share that I love pornography is because it's cheap. It doesn't cost my anything. There is so much free pornography on the internet I struggled in my addiction for years, consuming hundreds of hours of content, and never paid a dime.

At the time I told myself I wasn't paying for it. That made me feel better about myself. At least it made me feel better about my budget.

The problem with pornography being cheap is that it's a lie. Pornography is NOT cheap. It's exceedingly costly. My problem was that I was looking at it strictly from the material point

of view. I was looking only at dollar signs. How many dollars did I spend on my addiction? None? Ok, well no harm to the budget, no foul. The worldview problem with this is that I was behaving like a materialist, like a naturalist, as if the natural, physical, material world were what mattered most.

Don't get me wrong—the material world matters, but so does the spiritual. And that was what I was ignoring.

The truth is, pornography cost me SO much. It has cost me hours of my life wasted, given away to sin. It has cost me trust and intimacy with my wife, gone for whole seasons at a time due to relapse. It has cost me a job opportunity. It has cost me the intimacy of being known by my community of brothers who would love me, care for me, and shepherd me into a joy-filled, holy, pure, and blameless walk with the Lord. It has cost me time, intimacy, and joy from being with the Lord, knowing Him, and enjoying Him.

What costs more than your relationship with the Father?

I loved porn because it was cheap—well, free in terms of dollars. But in relational capital it has cost me something that can't be purchased with ALL the dollars in the world. It isn't enough.

I'm grateful to God that He paid the awful cost of my sin, when the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross and rise again. Jesus' death satisfied my sin's debt—the one I owed the Father.

Pornography is so expensive. It cost Jesus His life. Please, if you're addicted, turn to the Father today. Follow the counsel of James 5:16 today: "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed." I know you're scared. But trust me that this fear you feel for confessing and taking that first step out of addiction is from the enemy, not the Lord. Trust the Lord. He will make your path straight. He is good, and He loves you.

Why I Love Porn (The Lies)	How the Story Ends (The Truth)
It’s easy	But it doesn’t satisfy
It’s fast	But it sapped my life for years.
I’m in charge	Until I couldn’t stop.
I get what I want	Except I hate myself after.
It’s cheap	But it nearly cost me my marriage.

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Helping Teens Understand Homosexuality – Facts to Help Youth Withstand the Current Culture

Sue Bohlin provides practical ways to communicate with teens about common misunderstandings and the truth concerning homosexuality. Recognizing that teens deal with peer pressure to experiment and feelings of same sex attraction, she provides real ways to help teens make their way through this maze of contradiction and confusion.

In this article we look at ways to communicate the truth about homosexuality to teens. We examine the lies they are told and the sexual pressure they are under. We also look at ways to help kids process their gender confusion, as well as address helpful

ways to encourage teens who already identify themselves as gay or lesbian. And finally, we provide perspective on how to treat those who struggle with same-sex attraction in a compassionate and godly way. By looking at this topic, from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective, we can communicate the depth of God's love and His desire for us to experience the best life possible.

The Lies They Hear

In many schools and in the rest of the culture today, only one perspective is allowed to be heard. Consider four lies that are very familiar to teens today:

First, "*Homosexuality is normal and healthy.*" It's neither. The fact that it simply occurs (in about 2% of the population) doesn't make it normal. When we look at the way males and females were designed to complement each other both emotionally and sexually, that tells us something about the nature of homosexuality, that something has gone wrong somewhere. This is not judging the people who experience same-sex attraction; it's like a red light on the dashboard of a car, denoting that something needs attention.

Acting physically on same-sex attractions is certainly not healthy. Those who do are at far greater risk for sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS; alcoholism and drug abuse; depression; emotionally exhausting relationships; and a shortened lifespan.{1} Please see the "Facts About Youth" website from the American College of Pediatricians, especially this article: Health Risks of the Homosexual Lifestyle.

Lie #2: "*If you're attracted to someone of the same sex, that means you're gay or lesbian.*" Not so. It really means that there are unmet, God-given needs for love and attention that were supposed to be met earlier in life. Having crushes on other people, of both sexes, is also a normal part of adolescent development. It means teens are transitioning

emotionally from child to adult.

The third lie is, "*Since you were born that way, you can't change.*" First, there is no scientific evidence that anyone is born gay. It's a myth that has been repeated so often that people believe it. Second, thousands of people who were once gay have experienced significant changes in their attractions and behavior.{2} Change *is* possible.

The fourth lie is, "*Embrace and celebrate your gay identity, because gay life is cool.*" Those in ministry to those dealing with unwanted homosexuality have heard many heartbreaking stories of the truth: a dark side of intense and difficult relationships, relational patterns of disillusionment and breakups, physical and emotional unhealthiness.

Countless people have said they wished they never entered the gay community in the first place, but it's hard to leave.

Teens and Sexual Pressure

Adolescents are under an extraordinary amount of sexual pressure. They live in a sex-saturated culture, and the messages they receive from the media and, unfortunately, in school, clearly communicate an expectation that sex is just part of having a social life. Rarely do they hear about the heart-wrenching consequences of being sexually active, both physically and emotionally. The agenda pushing sexual freedom is also engaged in trying to normalize homosexuality as well.

Teens are pushed to decide early if they are gay, straight, or bisexual, as young as elementary school. But kids in their early teens, much less even younger than that, are no more equipped to "decide" their sexual orientation than they are to choose a college major and career track. A landmark study done by the University of Minnesota determined that at age twelve, one fourth of the students were unsure of their sexual orientation. Their bodies were just beginning to experience

the changes that would turn them from children into adults, and they were being asked if they were gay, straight, or bisexual. No wonder so many were confused! But by age seventeen, that number of kids unsure of their sexual orientation had dropped to 5%.{3}

And psychiatrist Dr. Jeffrey Satinover says, "[W]ithout any intervention whatsoever, three out of four boys who think they're gay at age 16 aren't by 25. So if we're going to treat homosexuality as a state, 75% of 'gays' become 'non-gay' spontaneously. That's a statement which I consider ludicrous, but if you accept this tacit proposition—that being gay is an actual state, like being short or being tall, black or white—then in three out of four people that condition changes itself spontaneously. . . That's with no outside intervention, just the natural processes of development."{4}

We need to tell teens, "It's too soon to 'declare a major' in your sexuality."

Teens are also pressured to experiment with both sexes as the only way they can know their sexual orientation. It's presented as nonchalantly as our cruise ship table partner suggesting we try escargot—"Hey, how can you know if you like it unless you try it out?"

Teenage sexual behavior can have lifelong consequences, but they are not in a position to recognize that. Their brains don't finish developing until age twenty-five, and they tend to make decisions out of the region of the brain that controls emotion. So they are easily swayed to make dangerous and irresponsible choices, like engaging in any kind of sexual behavior.

Teens need to be encouraged to face the sexual pressures and stand against them.

Gender Insecurity

At a conference I attended, author and ministry leader Andy Comiskey{5} shared a painful experience in junior high where one day, out of the blue, the whole school was abuzz with the rumor that Andy was gay. There was even graffiti about it on the wall. He struggled with his sexual identity, but he had never acted out. He walked into a classroom on an errand and on his way out, two boys called "Faggot!" He was crushed and humiliated. Later on, he made it into a self-fulfilling prophecy and immersed himself in the gay lifestyle.

I went up to him and asked, "If you could rewrite the script of that incident, knowing what you do today, what would it look like?" He said, "Oh, I wish there had been some sensitive adults, especially in the church, to talk freely with me and other kids about 'gender insecurity.' They wouldn't even have to talk about homosexuality or use the word—many kids can relate to the idea of 'gender insecurity.' It would have been so freeing for me to have someone acknowledge that it's a real thing, but it didn't mean I was gay. I wish there were people who could have spoken truth into my life at that point."

One kind of truth that kids should hear is that around age ten, attraction for the same sex begins. This attraction is emotional, non-sexual, and involuntary. It doesn't mean teens are gay or lesbian; it means they are transitioning through normal adolescent development. We have to learn to attach to people of our same sex before we can learn to attach to people of the opposite sex. But most teens don't know this.

Some kids don't feel secure in their masculinity or femininity for a variety of reasons, usually having to do with not being affirmed by parents and peers. God gives each of us needs for attention, approval and affection. When those needs are not met, the onset of hormones can sexualize this "hole in the heart." Some teens can find themselves longing for the attention, approval and affection of people of their same

gender. When others put on them the false and hurtful labels of “homo,” “fag,” or “lez,” they can easily find themselves believing the lies.

When teens are not secure in their gender, they *don’t* need to be pointed to gay groups at school. They need to be affirmed and encouraged to develop their innate, God-given masculinity or femininity, to see their gender as good. They need to have other kids reach out to make them feel “one of the guys” or “one of the girls.” They need time to finish growing up.

Teens Who Identify as Gay or Lesbian

Growing numbers of teens are self-identifying as gay or lesbian. In many circles, being gay—or claiming to be gay—is now considered cool, especially among girls.

Teenagers experiment with same-sex relationships for a variety of reasons. Some experience normal crushes on same-sex peers and think this means they are gay—or their friends *inform* them that’s what it means. What it really means is that they are learning to form deep and intense attachments which is a necessary precursor to maintaining long-term adult relationships like marriage.

Others experiment with same-sex relationships out of a legitimate need to belong. Some kids are simply curious; they just want to try it out like a new shade of lipstick.

Some teens experiment with same-sex relationships because others have labeled them gay or lesbian, and they wonder, “Am I? Do they know something I don’t know? Maybe I am and I need to go in that direction.” This is one reason it’s so important to impress on all kids the absolute unacceptability of name-calling and other cruelties. It’s not only bullying behavior, it can have terrible emotional consequences.

Some adolescents pursue same-sex relationships because they are anxious about growing into adolescence and the

responsibilities of adulthood. So they hide behind immature and emotionally volatile same-sex feelings and behaviors.

Often, what teens are attracted to in same-sex peers are the characteristics they wish they had in themselves: popularity, good looks, a winsome personality, a strong physique. This kind of jealousy doesn't mean they are gay or lesbian; it means there is an area they need to build confidence in!

Most girls who get involved in same-sex relationships start out in friendships that grow increasingly controlling and needy. In these emotionally dependent relationships, girls can get so enmeshed with each other that their relationship turns physical.

Many people who later identify as gay or lesbian report feeling different from others, feeling like they don't fit in or belong. Girls can feel like they don't belong to the world of girls, and guys almost always feel like they can't measure up in the world of males. This is gender insecurity, not homosexuality, but teens usually don't hear this message. They need to.

Labels such as "gay" and "lesbian" and "homo" and "dyke" are incredibly hurtful, and it is easy for those who are slapped with those labels to believe them. But God doesn't call anyone homosexual or lesbian; those labels are man's invention, not biblical truth. It's essential for teens to know who they are in God's sight—beloved, precious, and stamped with the imprint of His acceptance and delight.

When Teens Struggle with Same-Sex Attraction

If you know teens who are struggling with feelings of same-sex attraction, or who seem to be experiencing gender insecurity, let me make some suggestions on how to minister to them.

First, don’t address the issue of homosexuality head-on. Same-sex strugglers are always wrestling with feelings of inferiority, rejection, shame and fear, so it’s extremely uncomfortable for anyone to bring up the subject. The heart of the issue for kids who find themselves attracted to others of the same sex are these dark and negative feelings. It’s much better to ask indirect questions that encourage them to talk about the underlying feelings of disconnection with a parent, or the ridicule of their peers, or depression and sadness.

Second, don’t use any labels. Teens who struggle with their gender identity already have a huge struggle with feeling that the rest of the world has put an unwelcome label on them. The false, man-made labels of “gay” and “lesbian” are hurtful, false, and restricting.

Consider what it would be like if we created a label such as “angro” for people who are easily ticked off and walk around in a continual low-level state of hostility. What if people went around saying, “I’m an angry person. That’s just the way I am—that’s WHO I am. I’m an angro.” They might believe they were born angry, that they have an “angro gene.” Not only is the label of “angro” false and misleading, but it can lead people to believe the lie that it is a permanent state or condition rather than a description of one’s current feelings.

That’s what happened with the relatively recent labels of “gay” and “lesbian.” They can become like jail cells, making people feel hopelessly trapped in a state or condition. It’s much better to help teens deal with the fact that they are experiencing some attractions to their same gender, and those feelings are like the red light on the dashboard of a car. They mean there’s something going on inside that needs some attention. And that’s literally true: God creates all of us with the need for attention, affection and approval, and those are the things adolescents are craving when they have feelings for people of the same sex. The needs are legitimate; we need to help them be met in healthy ways. This is where the church

and other Christian youth organizations can make all the difference in the world.

Third, communicate to kids who struggle that God did not make them gay. God doesn't make anyone gay, and there is no scientific evidence that there is a biological basis for homosexual feelings or behavior. Even if they feel that they were born gay, this is the result of being told a fairy tale. Were American kids born English speakers? That's all they ever knew, right? No, they weren't *born* English speakers, they were born *language* speakers. Which language they speak is a matter of the shaping influences of their upbringing. Kids who experience same-sex attraction were born to be relational creatures, but how those relationships shape their souls is a function of their temperaments, their home life, and how they relate to other kids.

Fourth, give them a safe place to process their feelings without being shamed or condemned. For many teens, this unfortunately rules out their home, school, or church. I'm sure it grieves God's heart that for many people, church is the most unsafe place on the planet for those who struggle with various life-controlling sins and urges. But there is a great free, online support group for struggling youth, moderated by an experienced and understanding youth pastor, at www.livehope.org. Kids can safely talk to others like themselves and learn how intimacy with Jesus Christ brings healing and change to broken and wounded hearts.

Fifth, many students who experience same sex attraction often feel fake if they don't choose to identify with or act on their feelings. They have believed the lie that gay or lesbian is what they are. They want to be real. But getting real is becoming who God created them to be, despite their feelings of what whose around them might say.{6} Finding out who God says they are is the true path to being real and not fake.

The Call to Understanding and Compassion

Many teens feel, “I just don’t get this whole gay/lesbian thing.” That’s perfectly understandable. Only 2-3% of the population deals with same gender attraction. The fact that it’s such a huge issue in our culture is completely out of proportion to the actual number of people experiencing it.

Kids need to know a few things about those who do struggle with same-sex attractions and feelings. First, they didn’t choose it. It’s something people *discover*, not something they *decide on*. And almost every single person who discovers they have strong feelings and fantasies about the same sex is horrified and terrified by this discovery. It’s a very painful part of their life, so it’s important for others to be respectful and kind.

Second, having crushes and strong feelings for friends and teachers of the same sex is a normal part of adolescent development. It doesn’t mean a teen is gay or lesbian. When other kids assure them that it does, it is slapping a false and hurtful label on them that they may find almost impossible to take off. If someone walked up to you and put a “Hi, My Name Is” nametag on you that had someone else’s name on it, you probably wouldn’t have any trouble taking it off and saying, “There’s a mistake here—that’s not who I am.” But when kids do the same thing with the “nametag” of “gay” or “lesbian,” they usually put it on kids who don’t have the security and self-confidence to realize that’s not who they are, and they can go through the rest of their lives believing a lie.

Third, be compassionate. People don’t know who around them is struggling, either with their own same-sex desires and attractions, or the painful burden of knowing a family member or loved one has them. They only have to show contempt once for those who experience same-sex feelings to show that they’re not a safe person.

Fourth, be respectful. That means cutting phrases like "Oh, that's so gay" out of their vocabulary. It means not throwing around words like "homo" or "fag" or "queer." Every gay joke or insult is like sticking a dagger in the heart of those who carry a painful secret.

The bottom line for helping teens understand homosexuality is to call them to see God's design as good, and show grace and compassion to those who don't see it. Be "Jesus with skin on" in both His holiness *and* His kindness.

Notes

1. Peter Freiberg, "Study: Alcohol Use More Prevalent for Lesbians," *The Washington Blade*, January 12, 2001, p. 21. Karen Paige Erickson, Karen F. Trocki, "Sex, Alcohol and Sexually Transmitted Diseases: A National Survey," *Family Planning Perspectives* 26 (December 1994): 261. Robert S. Hogg et al., "Modeling the Impact of HIV Disease on Mortality in Gay and Bisexual Men," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 26 (1997): 657. Also note this article by Dr. John R. Diggs, Jr.: The Health Risks of Gay Sex (catholiceducation.org).
2. Read a few of the testimonies at the Living Hope Ministries website, www.livehope.org.
3. www.freetobeme.com/yw_minn.htm
4. Homosexuality and Teens: An Interview with Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, Massachusetts Family Institute. www.mafamily.org/Marriage%20Hearing%202003/satinover2.htm
5. Founder and Director of Desert Stream Ministries, author of *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness and Strength in Weakness*.
6. www.becomingreal.org

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See also: answers to many questions in **"Probe Answers Our E-Mail: Homosexuality"**

“I’m Looking for a Way to Deprogram Homosexuality”

I’m a licensed counselor looking for ways to de-program homosexuality.

I’m afraid we don’t know any formulaic means for de-programming homosexuality. And neither Probe nor Living Hope Ministries (a ministry that helps people with unwanted homosexuality) does “conversion therapy.” In my 20+ years with LHM, the only method I have seen that makes a difference is the time-honored process of Christian discipleship, where we point people to Jesus and walk with them in submitting to Him and His word, cooperating with the Holy Spirit in facing the wounds and hurts of the past and grieving them, forgiving those who hurt us, and obeying God’s commands because they are given to protect and bless us. The fruit of this process is transformation from the inside out (Romans 12:2), because Jesus doesn’t make things better, He makes things new.

What I have personally witnessed over and over is that God helps the person reframe their understanding of their lives, especially the hurts of the past (and there is always pain in the past) and their sinful responses to those hurts. This is true of any believer, not just those dealing with homosexuality. As the person invites Jesus to be Lord over more and more internal real estate, He brings change and understanding. For example, I keep seeing that men reframe their craving to connect with other men sexually as their heart’s cry for healthy attention, affirmation and affection from other men, either (or both) a father figure, or a best-friend kind of relationship. In women, I see that women

reframe their craving to intensely connect with another woman, as their heart's cry for those same 3 As from a mother or a best friend. When those legitimate needs are met in healthy relationships with other believers, the craving subsides. One of my closest friends, who spent 25 years as a lesbian activist before becoming a Christ follower, says that what used to be screaming in front of her face (her same sex attraction), is now white noise in the background of her life. It's not totally gone, and she can feed it when she's stressed which means additional temptations, but its control over her life has been replaced by intimacy with Jesus and with healthy relationships with women.

I don't know how this happens outside of the grace and power of God in a believer's life and in the context of community, because we need each other.

I'm glad you asked. And by the way, I see from your email address that you utilize EMDR in your therapy. God bless you for that! I am the beneficiary of its effectiveness as I have seen my husband healed of childhood traumas through EMDR. A number of the people at Living Hope—and friends fro church as well—have found EMDR helpful in their counseling, which makes sense because trauma is part of so many people's stories who now deal with same-sex attraction.

Blessing you today,

Sue

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“How Would You Respond When Someone Prefers to be Called by Their Opposite Gender?”

Sue, my friend texted me this:

“How would you respond (or how have you responded) when someone prefers to be called by their opposite gender? I had a man correct my daughter (she’s only two, almost three) today because she referred to him as ‘he.’ I told him out of deep love for him I could not in good conscience refer to him as ‘her’ but how do I explain that to an almost three-year-old?”

I answered, “Oh wow. That hasn’t happened to me yet. My big kids know and we said that sin clouds their judgment and how they see/feel so they think they will be happier living life as a different gender, but then we remind them that God doesn’t make mistakes and He chooses gender. He made us in His image (like Him) and His design is perfect . . . people mess it up, not Him.”

I tried, but would love to learn from your response also!

Sweet friend, LOVE your answer!! I would explain that sometimes people are confused in their thinking. God made that man a boy and so that is what we call him.

How do you lovingly respond to the gender confused person?

It depends on how the conversation goes, but I would remain warm and cordial while not backing down by embracing a delusion.

Think “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” Just because everyone appears to be celebrating something that doesn’t make sense, doesn’t make it true. And just as the crowd shushed the little boy who piped up with what everyone could plainly see—the

emperor didn’t have any clothes on at all—people are being shushed and canceled when they speak up about the transgender delusion.

One of the reasons the transgender folly continues is people going along with the game of pretend. (And when I say “transgender folly,” I am referring to the ideology, not the people caught up in it who need compassion, not judgment. I believe they are objects of spiritual warfare, being attacked by the enemy of our souls through an insidious lie. Just like in Genesis 3.)

When the man crossed the line to correct a stranger’s little girl, he escalated from confused soul to transgender activist. And activists want the whole world to agree with a delusion. A lie. And we need to push back.

If it were me, I would suggest saying to my child, with a kind voice, “This man is playing a game of pretend, but we’re not playing that game.” This of course would infuriate the man, but he is deliberately pushing an agenda of unreality on the world in general and my child in particular, and that’s not okay. It’s my responsibility to teach and defend truth to my children, and here’s a guy lying to my child and instructing her to participate in that lie.

It’s one thing to present oneself as the other sex, and quite another to cross the line into “incorrecting” a child who could see for herself that he was male! I would let my Mama Bear come out—with gentleness and respect, as 1 Peter 3:15 says—but firmly stating the truth in the face of an egregious lie.

Blessing you,
Sue Bohlin

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