

# Integrity – A Christian Virtue

*Kerby Anderson helps us understand the true meaning and importance of the Christian virtue of integrity. From a biblical worldview perspective, integrity is a critical element of a Christ centered life. Understanding integrity will help us incorporate it in our daily walk with Jesus Christ.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## Integrity and the Bible

The subject of this article is the concept of integrity—a character quality that we often talk about but don't see quite as regularly in the lives of public officials or even in the lives of the people we live and work with.

The word *integrity* comes from the same Latin root as *integer* and implies a wholeness of person. Just as we would talk about a whole number, so also we can talk about a whole person who is undivided. A person of integrity is living rightly, not divided, nor being a different person in different circumstances. A person of integrity is the same person in private that he or she is in public.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about those who were “pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8), implying an undividedness in following God's commands. Integrity, therefore, not only implies an undividedness, but a moral purity as well.

The Bible is full of references to integrity, character, and moral purity. Consider just a few Old Testament references to integrity. In 1 Kings 9:4, God instructs Solomon to walk with “integrity of heart and uprightness” as his father did. David

says in 1 Chronicles 29:17, "I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity." And in Psalm 78:70-72 we read that "David shepherded them with integrity of heart, with skillful hands."

The book of Proverbs provides an abundance of verses on integrity. Proverbs 10:9 says that, "He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out." A person of integrity will have a good reputation and not have to fear that he or she will be exposed or found out. Integrity provides a safe path through life.

Proverbs 11:3 says, "The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the falseness of the treacherous will destroy them." Proverbs is a book of wisdom. The wise man or woman will live a life of integrity, which is a part of wisdom. Those who follow corruption or falsehood will be destroyed by the decisions and actions of their lives.

Proverbs 20:7 says, "A righteous man who walks in his integrity; How blessed are his sons after him." Integrity leaves a legacy. A righteous man or woman walks in integrity and provides a path for his or her children to follow.

All of these verses imply a sense of duty and a recognition that we must have a level of discernment of God's will in our lives. That would certainly require that people of integrity be students of the Word, and then diligently seek to apply God's Word to their lives. The book of James admonishes us to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22). That is my goal in this article as we talk about integrity.

## **Corruption**

As we examine integrity, I would like to talk about its opposite: corruption. We claim to be a nation that demands integrity, but do we really? We say we want politicians to be

honest, but really don't expect them to be; perhaps because often we aren't as honest as we should be. We say that we are a nation of laws, but often we break some of those same laws—like speed limits and jaywalking— and try to justify our actions.

A powerful illustration can be found in the book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, by James Patterson and Peter Kim.<sup>[1]</sup> Using a survey technique that guaranteed the privacy and anonymity of the respondents, they were able to document what Americans really believe and do. The results were startling.

First, they found there was no moral authority in America. "Americans are making up their own moral codes. Only 13 percent of us believe in all the Ten Commandments. Forty percent of us believe in five of the Ten Commandments. We choose which laws of God we believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, when all our institutions commanded more respect."

Second, they found Americans are not honest. "Lying has become an integral part of American culture, a trait of the American character. We lie and don't even think about it. We lie for no reason." The authors estimate that 91 percent of us lie regularly.

Third, marriage and family are no longer sacred institutions. "While we still marry, we have lost faith in the institution of marriage. A third of married men and women confessed to us that they've had at least one affair. Thirty percent aren't really sure that they still love their spouse."

Fourth, they found that the "Protestant [work] ethic is long gone from today's American workplace. Workers around America frankly admit that they spend more than 20 percent (7 hours a week) of their time at work totally goofing off. That amounts to a four-day work week across the nation."

The authors conclude by suggesting that we have a new set of

commandments for America:

- I don't see the point in observing the Sabbath (77 percent).
- I will steal from those who won't really miss it (74 percent).
- I will lie when it suits me, so long as it doesn't cause any real damage (64 percent).
- I will cheat on my spouse; after all, given the chance, he or she will do the same (53 percent).
- I will procrastinate at work and do absolutely nothing about one full day in every five (50 percent).

We may say that we are a nation that wants integrity, but apparently a majority of us lack it in our own personal lives.

## **The Traits of Integrity**

### *Honesty*

I would now like to turn our focus toward four key traits found in a person of integrity. One of those traits is honesty.

We talked about some of the findings from the book *The Day America Told the Truth*. The authors found that nearly everyone in America lies and does so on a fairly regular basis. Truth telling apparently is no longer a virtue people try to adopt for their lives. We may say we want people to tell the truth, but we don't do it ourselves.

That is the problem with corruption; it is corrosive. We believe we can be dishonest just a little bit. We say we want people to be honest, but then we cheat on our taxes. We say we want people to obey the laws, but then we go "just a little" over the speed limit. We want to be honest just enough to ease our conscience.

It's a little like the story of the man who sent a letter to

the Internal Revenue Service. He said, "I cheated on my income taxes, and felt so bad that I couldn't sleep. Enclosed find a check for \$150. And if I still can't sleep I'll send the rest of what I owe."

Many of us can relate to that man. We want to be honest, but sometimes we find it easier to be dishonest. So we try to find a way to compromise our values so that a little bit of lying doesn't bother our conscience.

### *Trustworthiness*

Another characteristic of a person of integrity is trustworthiness. A person of integrity is unimpeachable. He or she stands by principles no matter what the consequences. A person of integrity realizes there are moral absolutes even in a world of relative values.

In Tom Clancy's novel, *Clear and Present Danger*, Jack Ryan is about the only noble character in the book. As he begins to uncover this clandestine government plot, he is confronted by the antagonist who makes fun of Jack Ryan's principles. He says, "You're a boy scout, Jack. Don't you get it? It's all grey. It's all grey."

I wonder how often people of integrity hear a similar statement in corporate board rooms or the halls of government. It's all grey. There are no absolute right and wrong values. It's all relative.

A person of integrity knows that it isn't all grey. There are principles worth standing by and promoting. There are values that should govern our lives. We have a responsibility to follow God's law rather than the crowd.

When the book of Proverbs talks of the "integrity of the upright" it implies that we adhere to God's will and God's laws. We have a duty to obey God's absolute commands in our lives and become men and women of integrity.

## *"Private" Life*

There is a popular book on the market entitled, *Who You Are When Nobody's Looking*. Who are you when nobody's looking? Will I see the same person that I see when you are in a group of people? Do you do the right thing no matter what the circumstances?

There was a newspaper story years ago about a man in Long Beach who went into a KFC to get some chicken for himself and the young lady with him. She waited in the car while he went in to pick up the chicken. Inadvertently the manager of the store handed the guy the box in which he had placed the financial proceeds of the day instead of the box of chicken. You see, he was going to make a deposit and had camouflaged it by putting the money in a fried chicken box.

The fellow took his box, went back to the car, and the two of them drove away. When they got to the park and opened the box, they discovered they had a box full of money. Now that was a very vulnerable moment for the average individual. However, realizing the mistake, he got back into the car and returned to the place and gave the money back to the manager. Well, the manager was elated! He was so pleased that he told the young man, "Stick around, I want to call the newspaper and have them take your picture. You're the most honest guy in town.

"Oh, no, don't do that!" said the fellow.

"Why not?" asked the manager.

"Well," he said, "you see, I'm married, and the woman I'm with is not my wife." [\[2\]](#)

Apparently he had not considered the consequences of his actions. Even when he was doing something right, it turned out he was also doing something wrong. A person of integrity is integrated and authentic. There is no duplicity of attitudes and actions.

When the apostle Paul lists the qualifications for an elder in the church, he says “he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:7). This is not only a desirable quality for church elders, it is a quality we should all aspire to. Christians should be “above reproach” in their public testimony before the watching world.

In the next section we will talk more about the importance of a public testimony of integrity and conclude our study.

## **Public Testimony**

I would like to conclude our discussion by addressing the importance of integrity in our daily lives.

It’s been said that we may be the only Bible some people ever read. In other words, people around us often judge the truthfulness of Christianity by its affect in our lives. If they see us as hypocrites, they may not go any further in their investigation of the gospel.

Every day we rub shoulders with people who are watching us. Your life will demonstrate to them whether Christianity is true or false. They make value judgements about you by your attitudes and actions. Have we made the right choice?

After his Sunday messages, the pastor of a church in London got on the trolley Monday morning to return to his study downtown. He paid his fare, and the trolley driver gave him too much change. The pastor sat down and fumbled the change and looked it over, counted it eight or ten times. And, you know the rationalization, “It’s wonderful how God provides.” He realized he was tight that week and this was just about what he would need to break even, at least enough for his lunch. He wrestled with himself all the way down that old trolley trail that led to his office. Finally, he came to the stop and got up, and he couldn’t live with himself. He walked

up to the trolley driver, and said, "Here. You gave me too much change. You made a mistake." The driver said, "No, it was no mistake. You see, I was in your church last night when you spoke on honesty, and I thought I would put you to the test." {3}

Fortunately the pastor passed the test. Do you pass the test when unbelievers look at you and your life and wonder if the gospel is true? It's a convicting question. When we live lives of integrity, opportunities for evangelism and ministry surface. When we don't, those opportunities dry up.

I have been encouraging you to develop a life of integrity. In some respects, it's a life-long process. But we have to begin somewhere. Our lives are the collection of choices we have made in the past<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> both good choices and bad choices. Perhaps you have seen the poem:

Sow a thought, reap an act.  
Sow an act, reap a habit.  
Sow a habit, reap a character.  
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

I would encourage you to begin to focus on the verses and biblical principles delineated here. If you want to be a person of integrity, it won't happen overnight. But if you don't make a deliberate plan to be a person of integrity, it will never happen at all.

## Notes

James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991).

*Dallas Times Herald*, 23 Sept. 1966.

Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations* (Assurance Publishers, 1990).

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# Partial Birth Abortion – From a Biblical Perspective

## A Commitment to Gruesomeness

This year is the twenty-seventh year of legal abortion, and the only thing that appears to have changed in the debate is the addition of newer and more gruesome abortion procedures. At the top of the list is partial birth abortion.

The first legislative debate on partial birth abortion took place back in 1995 when Representative Charles Canady introduced a bill to ban this unknown procedure. Congressional testimony revealed that a fetus was delivered feet first, up to the head, so that the skull could be pierced and the brain suctioned out.

Canady's bill was a response to a paper delivered by Martin Haskell, a doctor from Dayton, Ohio, at the National Abortion Federation. At the time, reaction to Haskell's practice ran high in Ohio and eventually nationwide. The state of Ohio became the first state to prohibit the procedure and Canady's bill began to focus the issue on a national level.

Who would have predicted that such a long and protracted battle would take place over the last five years? And perhaps that shows how extreme the abortion lobby has become by its willingness to defend any abortion procedure no matter how far advanced the pregnancy might be. It also demonstrates the judiciary's willingness to defend abortion at every turn.

Although Charles Canady's bill was passed by both the House (288 to 139) and Senate (54 to 44), it was vetoed by President

Clinton in April of 1996. Meanwhile, pro-life advocates were turning their energies to state legislatures. Partial birth abortion bans spread like wildfire through the legislatures. Today nearly three out of every five state legislatures have passed a ban, and some of these bans have been passed over gubernatorial vetoes. Unfortunately, liberal judges in various judicial jurisdictions have overturned many of these bans, alleging that they are vague or could threaten the life of the mother.

Congress has also reconsidered the issue again. Senator Rick Santorum reintroduced the ban in January 1997. A month later the newspaper *American Medical News* published an interview with Ron Fitzsimmons, executive director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers. He admitted that he lied on national television regarding the number of partial birth abortions performed and the reasons for them. This was a stunning revelation that thousands of such abortions had been performed and usually for no medical indications. The momentum for a ban on partial birth abortions seemed to be growing. And the bill again passed both houses of Congress with a larger margin. But the Senate vote (64 to 36) was still not quite large enough to ensure an override of the expected veto by President Clinton.

Currently Congress is considering the issue again. And there are many political commentators who wonder if the margin may grow again since this is an election year. Also, as we will discuss in more detail, the Supreme Court seemed poised to act on the issue as well. While that does not insure that a federal ban on partial birth abortion will pass this year, it does raise the stakes over this controversial and gruesome procedure. Will Congress or the courts eventually ban this procedure? That seems more likely now than at any time in the past. Certainly the next few months will tell. But how will that take place?

# The Current Climate

Publicity over the partial birth abortion procedure has helped build momentum. During the debate in October of 1999, Senator Rick Santorum and Senator Barbara Boxer engaged in the following exchange.

*Santorum:* But, again, what you are suggesting is if the baby's toe is inside the mother, you can, in fact, kill that baby.

*Boxer:* Absolutely not.

*Santorum:* Okay. So if the baby's toe is in, you can't kill the baby. How about if the baby's foot is in?

*Boxer:* You are the one who is making these statements.

*Santorum:* We are trying to draw a line here.

*Boxer:* I am not answering these questions.

*Santorum:* If the head is inside the mother, you can kill the baby.

Discussion and dialogue like this has helped solidify and bolster public opposition to partial birth abortion. Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has called this procedure "near-infanticide." Opinion polls show that he is not alone in his assessment. Even citizens and politicians who are sympathetic to abortion rights are repulsed by partial birth abortion.

Throughout this year the battle against partial birth abortion will be fought on two fronts: Congress and the courts. Pro-life advocates point out that vote counts in the Senate show they are getting very close to a veto-proof margin. Key senators forced to vote on this measure during an election year might make the difference.

Meanwhile, federal courts have forced the Supreme Court to deliberate on the issue. This fall federal judges in Wisconsin and Illinois found the partial birth abortion bans in their states to be constitutional. Before the laws could be implemented, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens issued a stay that holds the two state laws in limbo until the high court disposes of the appeals.

Legal experts say that the order is written in such a way as to force the court to directly consider the constitutionality of partial birth abortions, or else the court must leave these state laws in place. In either case, this appears to be a pro-life victory.

Last summer in Arizona, an abortionist was performing a partial birth abortion on what he thought was a twenty-three week old. Suddenly he realized the baby was actually thirty-seven weeks old. He stopped the abortion and delivered the baby. The police said that, "At this point it doesn't appear that anybody will be charged with anything." The reason? Nothing illegal was done.

President Clinton continues to veto congressional bans on this procedure, and judges continue to overturn state bans on this procedure. But it appears that in the year 2000 that is about to change.

## **The Biblical Perspective**

Before we continue this discussion I wanted to focus on the biblical perspective of abortion. A key passage in this discussion is Psalm 139, where David reflected on God's sovereignty in his life.

The psalm opens with the acknowledgment that God is omniscient; He knows what the psalmist, David, is doing. God is aware of David's thoughts before he expresses them. Wherever David might go, he could not escape from God, whether

he traveled to heaven or ventured into Sheol. God is in the remotest part of the sea and even in the darkness. David then contemplated the origin of his life and confessed that God was there forming him in the womb.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Here David wrote of God's relationship with him while he was growing and developing before birth. The Bible does not speak of fetal life as mere biochemistry. This is not a piece of protoplasm that became David. This was David already being cared for by God while in the womb.

Verse 13 speaks of God as the Master Craftsman, weaving and fashioning David into a living person. In verses 14-15 David reflected on the fact that he was a product of God's creative work within his mother's womb, and he praised God for how wonderfully God had woven him together.

David drew a parallel between his development in the womb and Adam's creation from the earth. Using figurative language in verse 15, he referred to his life before birth when "I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth." This poetic allusion hearkens back to Genesis 2:7, which says that Adam was made from the dust of the earth.

David also noted that "thine eyes have seen my unformed substance." This shows that God knew David even before he was known to others. The term translated "unformed substance" derives from the verb "to roll up." When David was forming as a fetus, God's care and compassion were already extended to

him. The reference to “God’s eyes” is an Old Testament term connoting divine oversight of God in the life of an individual or a group of people.

While there are certainly other passages in the Old and New Testament that speak to the sanctity of human life, I believe that Psalm 139 is sufficient to show why Christians must oppose abortion, especially partial birth abortion. The unborn baby is a human being that God cares for. It should not be sacrificed in the womb for convenience or even for fetal parts that might improve the medical condition of another person. The unborn must be protected at every stage of development.

Partial birth abortion is a controversial and gruesome procedure. It is also against the will of God. Christians must speak out against the horror of this procedure and do whatever they can to make the procedure illegal.

## **Fetal Tissue Trafficking**

I would like to turn our focus to a related issue: the traffic of fetal tissue parts. In the fall of 1999, a pro-life group by the name of Life Dynamics published their two-year investigation of the traffic of fetal body parts. They produced copies of brochures, protocols, and price lists that document the interstate commerce of fetal body parts. One brochure touts “the freshest tissue available.” A price list provides a grim picture of the trafficking in cannibalized body parts: eyes are \$50 to \$75 depending on the age of the fetus, skin is \$100, a spinal cord is \$325.

The investigation provided new insight into why the fight against partial birth abortion has been so tough. Partial birth abortion, after all, is a difficult procedure that involves turning the fetus in the womb and removing it feet first. This complicates the abortion and therefore poses more risk to the mother. So why do abortionists do it? Fetal tissue parts. Quite simply, if you want an intact brain, spinal cord,

or limbs, partial birth abortion will provide that in ways that other abortion techniques will not.

Essentially scientists who need human body parts for research have found a loophole in the federal law that prohibits the sale of body parts. Abortion clinics provide these companies with whole or dismembered aborted fetuses for a service fee. This is listed as a "site fee" which is "rental on the space" that a body parts company employee occupies within the clinic. The company can, therefore, argue that they are donating the parts, but charging reasonable costs for retrieval which the federal law does allow. As long as the retrieval fees are higher than the site fee, they can make a profit.

Just one look at the "Fees for Services Schedule" can be chilling. Prices for every conceivable body part are listed. But it's important to notice that an intact embryonic cadaver costs \$600. Why should there be a retrieval fee for that? Why not just list the cost of shipping? This discrepancy illustrates how the body parts companies are trying to circumvent the law.

Gene Rudd, an obstetrician and member of the Christian Medical and Dental Society's Bioethics Commission, said: "It's the inevitable logical progression of a society that, like Darwin, believes we came from nothing. . . . This is the inevitable slide down the slippery slope." He is appalled by this "death for profit" scheme that takes the weakest of the species to satisfy our desires.

Apparently women who come into an abortion clinic are asked to sign a document allowing the clinic to donate their aborted baby to research. No fetus may be used without permission. Then the clinic receives orders (usually from their fax machine) for parts that will be retrieved and shipped. Many of the protocols require that the specimens be obtained within minutes after the abortion and frozen or preserved.

Life Dynamics' two year investigation clearly documents what many of us suspected all along. The fight against partial birth abortion was so tough because a lot of money and fetal tissue was a stake. This procedure has little to do with providing women with choice and everything to do with the interstate trafficking of fetal body parts.

A technician identified as "Kelly" came to Life Dynamics with this story of the traffic of fetal body parts.

The doctor walked into the lab and set a steel pan on the table. "Got you some good specimens," he said. "Twins." The technician looked down at a pair of perfectly formed 24-week-old fetuses moving and gasping for air. Except for a few nicks from the surgical tongs that had pulled them out, they seemed uninjured. "There's something wrong here," the technician stammered. "They are moving. I don't do this."

She watched the doctor take a bottle of sterile water and fill the pan until the water ran over the babies' mouths and noses. Then she left the room. "I would not watch those fetuses moving," she recalls. "That's when I decided it was wrong."

Back in the fall of 1999, Life Dynamics published its two-year investigation of the traffic of fetal body parts. They produced copies of brochures, protocols, and price lists that document the interstate commerce of fetal body parts.

I believe their investigation provided new insight into why the fight against partial birth abortion has been so tough. This procedure provides fetal tissue parts that are intact and thus available to research labs for a profit. And these are respected, tax-funded laboratories pursuing laudable goals like treating diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

"Kelly" says that it was her job to go to abortion clinics to procure tissue "donations." She would get a generated list each day of what tissue researchers needed and then look at the particular patient charts to determine where the specimens

would be obtained. She would look for the most perfect specimens to give the researchers "the best value that we could sell for."

Fetuses ranged in age from seven weeks to 30 weeks and beyond. Typically, "Kelly" harvested tissue from 30 to 40 "late" fetuses each week. These are delivered using the partial birth abortion procedure.

"Kelly" and others like her would harvest eyes, livers, brains, thymuses, and especially cardiac blood. Then they would pack and freeze the tissue and send them out by standard couriers (UPS, FedEx) to the research laboratories requesting the material. Life Dynamics has produced copies of forms for fetal parts from researchers. They contain the names of researchers, universities, pharmaceutical companies, and more.

Proponents of the research argue that the goal justifies the means. After all, these babies would have been aborted anyway. Why not use the discarded parts to further science and improve the quality of living of others? Christopher Hook, a fellow with the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity calls this exploitation of the unborn "too high a price regardless of the supposed benefit. We can never feel comfortable with identifying a group of our brothers and sisters who can be exploited for the good of the whole." He believes that, "Once we have crossed that line, we have betrayed our covenant with one another as a society and certainly the covenant of medicine."

This is the sad legacy of partial birth abortion and the international traffic of fetal body parts. Christians must stand up against this gruesome practice and reassert the sanctity of human life and work for the banning of these procedures.

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# Online Affairs – A Christian Look at a Major Problem

*Kerby Anderson highlights online affairs, the sin of adultery with an “electronic” relationship on the Internet.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## The Allure of Cyber-Relationships

The Internet is becoming a breeding ground for adultery, so say many experts who track the pattern of extramarital affairs. So we will discuss the phenomenon of online affairs.

Peggy Vaughn is the author of *The Monogamy Myth* and also serves as an expert for America Online on problems caused by infidelity. She predicts that one “role of the Internet in the future will be as a source of affairs.” She is writing a second book on the subject of adultery and says she could base half of it just on the letters she receives from people who started an affair online.[\[1\]](#)

An online affair (or cyberaffair) is an intimate or sexually explicit communication between a married person and someone other than their spouse that takes place on the Internet. Usually this communication takes place through an online service such as America Online or CompuServe. Participants usually visit a chat room to begin a group conversation and then often move into a one-to-one mode of communication. Chat room categories range from “single and liking it” to “married and flirting” to “naked on the keyboard.”

Women in a chat room are often surprised at what develops in a fairly short period of time. At first the conversation is

stimulating, though flirtatious. Quickly, however, women are often confronted with increasingly sexual questions and comments. Even if the comments don't turn personal, women find themselves quickly sharing intimate information about themselves and their relationships that they would never share with someone in person. Peggy Vaughn says, "Stay-at-home moms in chat rooms are sharing all this personal stuff they are hiding from their partners." She finds that the intensity of women's online relationships can "quickly escalate into thinking they have found a soulmate."

Online affairs differ from physical world affairs in some ways, but are similar in others. Cyberaffairs are based upon written communication where a person may feel more free to express herself anonymously than in person. Frequently the communication becomes sexually graphic and kinky in ways that probably would not occur if a real person were hearing these comments and could act on them. Participants in an online affair will often tell their life stories and their innermost secrets. They will also create a new persona, become sexually adventurous, and pretend to be different than they really are.

Pretending is a major theme in cyberaffairs. Men claim to be professionals (doctors, lawyers) who work out every day in the gym. And they universally claim that if their wives met their needs, they wouldn't be sex shopping on the Internet. Women claim to be slim, sexy, and adventurous. The anonymity of the Internet allows them to divulge (or even create) their wildest fantasies. In fact, their frank talk and flirtation pays great dividends in the number of men in a chat room who want to talk to them and get together with them.

Just as the Internet has become a new source of pornography for many, so it seems that it has also become a new source for affairs. Relationships online frequently go over the line leaving pain, heartbreak, and even divorce in their wake. Even though these online affairs don't involve sex, they can be very intense and threaten a marriage just the same.

# Current Statistics on Adultery

In a [previous article](#), I talked about some of the statistics concerning adultery. Before we continue, let me update some of those numbers with a multitude of studies all coming to similar conclusions.

One conclusion is that adultery is becoming more common, and researchers are finding that women are as likely as men to have an affair. A 1983 study found that 29 percent of married people under 25 had had an affair with no statistical difference between the number of men and women who chose to be unfaithful to their spouses early in life.[{2}](#) By comparison, only 9 percent of spouses in the 1950s under the age of 25 had been involved in extramarital sex. Another study concluded that by age 40 about 50 to 65 percent of husbands and 45 to 55 percent of wives become involved in an extramarital affair.[{3}](#)

Affairs are usually more than a one-time event. A 1987 study surveyed 200 men and women and found that their affairs lasted an average of two years.[{4}](#) In fact, affairs go through transitions over time. They may begin as romantic, sexual, or emotional relationships and may become intimate friendships. Affairs that become friendships can last decades or a lifetime.

Online affairs differ from other affairs in that they may not involve a physical component, but the emotional attachment is still there. Online affairs develop because of the dual attraction of attention and anonymity. Someone who has been ignored by a spouse (or at least perceives that he or she is ignored) suddenly becomes the center of attention in a chat room or a one-on-one e-mail exchange. A woman finds it exciting, even intoxicating, that all these men want to talk to her. And they are eager to hear what she says and needs.

Anonymity feeds this intoxication because the person on the other end of this cyberaffair is unknown. He or she can be as

beautiful and intelligent as your dreams can imagine. The fantasy is fueled by the lack of information and the anonymity. No one in cyberland has bad breath, a bald head, love handles, or a bad temper. The sex is the best you can imagine. Men are warm, sensitive, caring, and communicative. Women are daring, sensual, and erotic.

Is it all too good to be true? Of course it is. Cyberaffairs are only make-believe. Usually when cyberlovers meet, there is a major letdown. No real person can compete with a dream lover. No marriage can compete with a cyberaffair. But then an online affair can't really compete with a real relationship that provides true friendship and marital intimacy.

Nevertheless, online affairs are seductive. An Internet addict calls out to a spouse "one more minute" just as an alcoholic justifies "one more drink." Cyberaffairs provide an opportunity to become another person and chat with distant and invisible neighbors in the high-tech limbo of cyberspace. Social and emotional needs are met, flirting is allowed and even encouraged, and an illusion of intimacy feeds the addiction that has caught so many unsuspecting Internet surfers.

## **Motivations for Affairs**

Affairs usually develop because the relationship meets various social and psychological needs. Self-esteem needs are often at the top of the list. Self-esteem needs are met through knowing, understanding, and acceptance. Psychologists say that those needs are enhanced through talking intimately about feelings, thoughts, and needs. This can take place in person or take place through the Internet.

Even though online affairs may not involve a physical component, the emotional attachment can be just as strong and even overwhelming. And when they end, this strong attachment usually leaves participants in emotional pain.

Women report feeling thrilled by their lover's interest in them physically, emotionally, and intellectually. They are also excited about the chance to know a different man (how he thinks and feels). They also feel intimate with their lovers because they can talk about their feelings openly. However, when the affair ends, they feel a great deal of guilt with regard to their husband and children. They also regret the deceit that accompanied the affair.

Men report feeling excited about the sexual experience of the affair. They try to control their feelings in the affair and do not compete with their feelings for their wife. Often they limit the emotional involvement with their lover. Men also feel guilt and regret over deceit when an affair ends, but less so than most women.

Men and women have affairs for different reasons. Research has shown that women seek affairs in order to be loved, have a friend, and feel needed. Men seek affairs for sexual fulfillment, friendship, and fun.[{5}](#)

It appears that the percentage of women who have extramarital sex has increased the last few decades. In 1953 Alfred Kinsey found that 29 percent of married women admitted to at least one affair.[{6}](#) A *Psychology Today* survey in 1970 reported that 36 percent of their female readers had extramarital sex.[{7}](#) One study in 1987 found that 70 percent of women surveyed had been involved in an affair.[{8}](#)

It also appears that women who are employed full-time outside of the home are more likely to have an affair than full-time homemakers. Several studies come to this same conclusion. One study found that 47 percent of wives who were employed full-time and 27 percent of full-time homemakers had been involved in an affair before they were 40 years old.[{9}](#) And *New Woman* magazine found that 57 percent of employed wives who had an affair met their lover at work.[{10}](#)

Contrary to conventional wisdom, an affair will not help your marriage. In 1975, Linda Wolfe published *Playing Around* after she studied twenty-one women who were having affairs to keep their marriages intact.[\[11\]](#) The reasoning for many of these women was that if they could meet their own needs, their marriages would be more successful. Many said they were desperately lonely. Others were afraid, believing their husbands did not love them or were not committed to their marriage. Five years after the initial study, only three of the twenty-one women were still married.

Adultery can destroy a marriage, whether a physical affair or an online affair.

## Preventing an Affair

The general outline for some of these ideas comes from family therapist Frank Pittman, author of *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*, although I have added additional material. He has counseled 10,000 couples over the last forty years, and about 7,000 have experienced infidelity. He has nineteen specific suggestions for couples on how to avoid affairs.[\[12\]](#) Let's look at a few of them.

First, accept the possibility of being sexually attracted to another and of having sexual fantasies. Frank Pittman believes we should acknowledge that such thoughts can develop so that you don't scare them into hiding. But he also says you shouldn't act on them.

Second, we should hang out with monogamous people. He says, "They make a good support system." To state it negatively, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Third, work on your marriage. He says to keep your marriage sexy and work to be intimate with your spouse. He also says to make marriage an important part of your identity. "Carry your

marriage with you wherever you go.”

Fourth, be realistic about your marriage. Pittman says, “Don’t expect your marriage to make you happy. See your partner as a source of comfort rather than a cause of unhappiness.” Accept the reality of marriage; it isn’t always beautiful. Also accept that you are both imperfect.

Fifth, keep the marriage equal. Share parenting duties. “If not, one partner will become the full-time parent, and the other will become a full-time child” without responsibilities, who seeks to be taken care of. And keep the relationships equal. Pittman says, “The more equal it is, the more both partners will respect and value it.”

Sixth, if you aren’t already married, be careful in your choice of a marriage partner. For example, marry someone who believes in, and has a family history of, monogamy. Frank Pittman says, “It is a bad idea to become the fifth husband of a woman who has been unfaithful to her previous four.” Also, marry someone who respects and likes your gender. “They will get over the specialness of you yourself and eventually consider you as part of a gender they dislike.”

Seventh, call home every day you travel. “Otherwise, you begin to have a separate life.” And stay faithful. “If you want your partner to (stay faithful), it is a good idea to stay faithful yourself.” And make sure you are open, honest, and authentic. Lies and deception create a secret life that can allow an affair to occur.

Finally, don’t overreact or exaggerate the consequences of an affair if it occurs. Pittman says, “It doesn’t mean there will be a divorce, murder or suicide. Catch yourself and work your way back into the marriage.”

Affairs can destroy a marriage. Take the time to affair-proof your marriage so you avoid the pain, guilt and regret that inevitably results. And if you have fallen into an affair,

work your way back and rebuild your marriage.

## Consequences of Affairs

When God commands, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14), He did so for our own good. There are significant social, psychological, and spiritual consequences to adultery.

A major social cost is divorce. An affair that is discovered does not have to lead to divorce, but often it does. About one-third of couples remain together after the discovery of an adulterous affair, while the other two-thirds usually divorce.

Not surprisingly, the divorce rate is higher among people who have affairs. Annette Lawson (author of *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal*) found that spouses who did not have affairs had the lowest rate of divorce. Women who had multiple affairs (especially if they started early in the marriage) had the highest rate of divorce.

A lesser known fact is that those who divorce rarely marry the person with whom they are having the affair. For example, Dr. Jan Halper’s study of successful men (executives, entrepreneurs, professionals) found that very few men who have affairs divorce their wife and marry their lovers. Only 3 percent of the 4,100 successful men surveyed eventually married their lovers.[{13}](#)

Frank Pittman has found that the divorce rate among those who married their lovers was 75 percent.[{14}](#) The reasons for the high divorce rate include: intervention of reality, guilt, expectations, a general distrust of marriage, and a distrust of the affairee.

The psychological consequences are also significant, even if they are sometimes more difficult to discern. People who pursue an affair often do so for self-esteem needs, but often further erode those feelings by violating trust, intimacy, and

stability in a marriage relationship. Affairs do not stabilize a marriage, they upset it.

Affairs destroy trust. It's not surprising that marriages formed after an affair and a divorce have such a high divorce rate. If your new spouse cheated before, what guarantee do you have that this person won't begin to cheat on you? Distrust of marriage and distrust of the affairee are significant issues.

Finally, there are spiritual consequences to affairs. We grieve the Lord by our actions. We disgrace the Lord as we become one more statistic of moral failure within the body of Christ. We threaten the sacred marriage bond between us and our spouse. We bring guilt into our lives and shame into our marriage and family. Affairs extract a tremendous price in our lives and the lives of those we love and hold dear.

And let's not forget the long-term consequences. Affairs, for example, can lead to unwanted pregnancies. According to one report, "Studies of blood typing show that as many as 1 out of every 10 babies born in North America is not the offspring of the mother's husband."[\[15\]](#) Affairs can also result in sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, or even AIDS. Many of these diseases are not curable and will last for a lifetime.

Adultery is dangerous, and so are online affairs. The popularity of the recent movie *You've Got Mail* has helped feed the fantasy that you are writing to Tom Hanks or Meg Ryan. In nearly every case, nothing could be further from the truth. An online affair could happen to you, and the plot might be more like *Fatal Attraction*.

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## Valentine's Day Brings Back That Lovin' Feeling

February is known for cold weather, presidents' birthdays and Cupid's delight. As Valentine's Day approaches, hearts

flutter, lovers sigh and Charlie Brown hopes that little red-haired girl will like the card he's been gathering up the courage to give her.

Love, sex and amorous relationships have dominated the news over the past year. Not every culture is as comfortable as ours with public displays of affection. In one Malaysian state, laws ban total darkness in movie theaters "to prevent immoral acts like kissing, cuddling and other activities," as one official explained it. Public kissing there usually rates a \$70 fine.

In Venezuela, extended public kissing and embracing can get you arrested. "If you kiss for more than five seconds, the police will grab you," complained one young woman whose friends were jailed. "It's ridiculous," grouched a 24-year-old man. "Whoever invented this law must not have a girlfriend."

Defining immoral kisses can be difficult admitted one policeman, but "when you see it, you should know it." (Has he been reading U.S. Supreme Court decisions?)

Kids often have unique insights into adults' urge to merge. A friend passed along from the Internet children's answers to questions about love. What do people do on a date? Lynnette (age 8): "Dates are for having fun, and people should use them to get to know each other. Even boys have something to say if you listen long enough."

Martin (age 10) sees the bottom line: "On the first date, they just tell each other lies, and that usually gets them interested enough to go for a second date."

When is it OK to kiss someone? Pam (7): "When they're rich!" Curt (7): "The law says you have to be eighteen, so I wouldn't want to mess with that." Howard (8): "The rule goes like this: If you kiss someone, then you should marry them and have kids with them....It's the right thing to do."

How does one decide whom to marry? Allan (10): "You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff. Like if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dips coming." Allan may find it prudent to slightly revise that theory in a few years.

This season pundits ponder, "What is genuine love?" Popular speaker Josh McDowell delineates three kinds of love that can inform kids' (and adults') attitudes: love if, love because of, and love period. Love if and because of are based on personality or performance: "I love you if you go out with me, if you have a good sense of humor, if you sleep with me. I love you because you're attractive, intelligent or athletic."

But the best kind of love says, "I love you period: even with your weaknesses, even if you change, even if someone better looking comes along. Even if you have zoo-breath in the morning. I want to give myself to you."

Paul, an early Christian writer, eloquently described this unconditional love: "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. ...Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever..."

Committed unconditional love could probably heal many romantic rifts. Solid spiritual roots that help produce it can help undergird stable relationships. And the children have noticed that families and adult relationships can use some strengthening.

How can a stranger tell if two people are married? Derrick (8): By "whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids." And how would the world be different if people didn't get married? Kelvin (8): "There sure would be a lot of kids to explain, wouldn't there?"

# Sexual Purity – A Biblical Worldview Perspective Remains Truth

*Dr. Bohlin uses a passage from Proverbs to provide us insight into the importance of sexual purity for our age. This important biblical worldview concept is still valid today even in this age where sexual promiscuity is trumpeted from the media.*

## Medical Reasons for Sexual Purity

As our society prepares to enter the 21st century, one trend and long-time staple of our culture looms ever larger on the horizon. The places to which one can escape in order to avoid sexual temptation continue to shrink. Children cannot be allowed to roam unsupervised through the neighborhood video stores because of the racks of videos with alluring covers of scantily clad exercisers and playmates of the year. The aisles of popular new releases contain images from R-rated movies that were only found in skin magazines thirty years ago. A trip to the grocery store can take you past the book aisle with suggestive covers on romance novels which contain graphic descriptions of sexual encounters. Billboards for beer, cars, and movies all use sex to sell. Radio stations readily play songs today that were banned from the airwaves decades ago. A trip to the mall takes you past stores with only sex to sell.

Your home is invaded with sexually explicit images over even the free non-cable channels and your home computer. Unwelcome mail enters your home selling well-known sex magazines that continue to earn millions of dollars every year.

From the moment Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness, sexual temptation has been in our midst. But except for brief periods in declining cultures, the temptations had to be sought after. There were places where one could be relatively safe from the sights and sounds which inflame lust and desire. Those days are over. Oh, sure, you can have blocks installed on your computer or phone and the local video store will allow you to put a screen on your children's rentals. But the fact that such systems are necessary and only voluntary should be enough to tell us of the pervasiveness of sex in our society. Sexual purity is a rare and often scorned virtue today. When a Hollywood couple makes it known that they are saving sex for marriage, people ask, "Why would you do that?"

While sex is clearly pervasive in our society, you don't have to look very far to find plenty of reasons to avoid sexual relations outside of marriage. The biblical words for *fornication* or *sexual immorality* refer to all sexual activity outside of marriage, and the Scriptures clearly state that all such activity is forbidden (Lev. 18 & 20; Matt. 15:19; 1 Cor. 6:9-10,18; 1 Thess. 4:3). But a person may rationalize that while sexual activity outside of marriage is sin, "I can always be forgiven for my sin, and as long as I am not found out, who gets hurt?" Paul answers this resoundingly in Romans 6. "May it never be!" cries the apostle. By allowing sin to reign in our hearts we effectively say that Christ's death and resurrection has no power in our life.

If this is not powerful enough, consider the physical consequences of sexual immorality that exist today. In the 1960s there were only two STDs: syphilis and gonorrhea. Today there are over 25, and 1 in 5 Americans between the ages of 15 and 55 has a viral STD. That number is 1 in 4 if bacterial

infections are included. There are 12 million new infections every year with 60 percent of these among teenagers.

Chlamydia and gonorrhea can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease which often results in sterility. Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) frequently produces genital warts which can develop into cancer. Rampant HPV infection is the primary reason that women are urged to have Pap smears on a yearly basis. If you are sexually active outside of marriage and "lucky," you may only contract herpes, but even this is an embarrassing, bothersome, incurable infection. But you may get AIDS, which will kill you. Since the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) can lie dormant for years before developing into deadly AIDS, your sex partner may not know that he or she is infected. The fact is, if you are sexually active outside of marriage, it is almost guaranteed that you will contract at least one STD.

But information is not enough. Why is sexual purity within marriage so important to God? And what do we do to avoid falling into sexual sin with so much temptation swirling around our heads? We will now turn to explore some time tested advice from Scripture to see what we must do and why.

## **The Naturalistic Rejection of the Mystical Nature of Marriage**

In his book *Reason in the Balance*, Phillip Johnson brilliantly documents the vise grip of philosophical naturalism in science, law, and education in the United States. Our populace has been taught for so long that matter, energy, space, and time are all that exists that it has infected every form of cultural discourse, including our sexual behavior. Freedom of choice and personal fulfillment are praised as the ultimate virtues because, for the naturalist, sex is just a physical act that fulfills a basic need and instinct of every person. People should be free to pursue whatever sexual expression

they choose to meet that basic physiological need. And this need is only created by our fundamental drive to reproduce and spread our genes into the next generation. In the naturalistic worldview, sex becomes simply a basic need and marriage just a relative cultural expression to satisfy that need for some, but not all people.

That is why so many people, including Christians, look at Scripture's clear statements condemning sex outside of marriage as antiquated and old-fashioned. "Oh," they say, "they applied to the people of that time, but not now. Not as we prepare to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century!" But this raises some important questions. First, do the Scriptural injunctions against any sex outside of marriage really apply today? The answer, of course, is, "Yes, they do." We recognize readily what the Bible has to say about sex, and we see all about us the physical, emotional, and relational consequences of sexual immorality. Since God is sovereign, He established these consequences as warning signs not to transgress His principles. But second, just why is sexual fidelity so important to God?

The first reason is because God's intentions for marriage were clearly stated right from the beginning. Genesis 2:18-25 makes it plain that God's design was one man and one woman for life. Jesus used this passage as the basis for His teaching on divorce in Matthew 19: "What God has joined together, let no man break apart." As Creator, God has every right to tell us what He wants.

Second, the Father has used the marriage union as an analogy for His relationship with Israel in the Old Testament and the church's relationship with Jesus in the New Testament. Isaiah 1:21, Jeremiah 2:20, 3:1-10, and especially Ezekiel 16:15-34 accuse Israel of playing the harlot, chasing after other gods and ignoring her rightful "husband." God's union with Israel was to be forever. He was faithful, but Israel was not. The

Lord rained down His judgment on the unfaithfulness of Israel and Judah. In Ephesians 5 Paul tells husbands that they are to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Elsewhere, Jesus is spoken of as the bridegroom and the church as His bride, another relationship that is to be forever. Jesus will be faithful. Will the church? Our marital and sexual relationships are to mirror the Lord's special relationships with Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New. God hates divorce and any sexual relationships outside of marriage, because He hates it when His faithfulness to us is spurned by our turning to other gods. This is true whether they be the pagan gods of old, which are still around, or the modern gods of self, money, power, and sex.

Well, we may know what is right, but knowing what is right is often not the same as doing what is right. Now, I want to look at a passage in Proverbs that instructs its readers concerning dangers, both obvious and subtle, of sexual temptation.

## **A Young Man Lacking Sense Meets a Harlot**

It is hard for some to imagine that the Bible contains explicit advice on how to avoid sexual temptation. But the entire chapter of Proverbs 7 is devoted to exactly that. In the first five verses, Solomon essentially pleads with his son to listen and guard his words carefully concerning the adulteress.

My son, keep my words,  
And treasure my commandments within you.

Keep my commandments and live,  
*(sounds like serious stuff!)*

And my teaching as the apple of your eye.

*(actually the "pupil" or "little man of your eye." This was meant therefore to be a precious truth to be closely guarded and kept.)*

Solomon goes on in verse 3:

Bind them on your fingers;  
Write them on the tablet of your heart.

Say to wisdom, "You are my sister,"  
And call understanding your intimate friend.

That they may keep you from an adulteress,  
From the foreigner who flatters with her words.

In verses 6-9, King Solomon takes the role of an observer,  
telling his son what he sees unfolding before him.

For at the window of my house,  
I looked out through my lattice,

And I saw among the naive,  
I discerned among the youths,  
A young man lacking sense.

Passing through the street near her corner;  
And he takes the way to her house.

In the twilight, in the evening,  
In the middle of the night and in the darkness.

Solomon speaks of one who is young, inexperienced, and lacking judgment. His first clue was that he purposefully walks down her street and actually heads straight to her house in the middle of the night. As Charlie Brown would say, "Good grief!" The young man's intent is probably harmless. He is curious, perhaps hoping for a glimpse of the adulteress plying her wares to someone else on the street. Sin is probably not on his mind. He just wants to see what the real world is like. That kind of thinking is still heard today. "I just need to know what is out there so I can warn my family and others around me." In reality, our young fool was looking for titillation and was confident that he could withstand the temptation.

This is precisely why Solomon says he is lacking sense. The apostle Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." Overconfidence is our worst enemy in the face of temptation. I am reminded of two contrasting characters in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Boromir and Faramir. Boromir and Faramir were brothers. Boromir, the elder, was renowned for his exploits in war. He was his father's favorite and the principal heir. He was confident, however, that were he to wield the One Ring, the Ring of Power, he would not be corrupted by it and could use it to defeat the armies of the evil Sauron. However, his overconfidence and lust for power lead him to attempt to steal the ring from the designated Ring-bearer. His foolishness caused the Fellowship of the Ring to be split apart under attack and led eventually to his death. He thought he could stand, but he fell.

His brother Faramir, however, had a more realistic picture of his sinful nature. When confronted later with the same opportunity to see and even hold the Ring, he refused. He knew the temptation would be strong and that the best way not to yield to the lust for power was to keep the temptation as far away as possible. Faramir, though perceived to be weaker than his brother, was, in a sense, actually the wiser and stronger of the two. He took heed and did not fall and later played a significant role in the final victory over the forces of evil.

What about you? Do you consider yourself strong enough to resist the temptations presented in movies, books, commercials, etc.? Do you walk into the movie theater blindly, lacking sense, uninformed as to why this movie is R-rated or even PG-13? Are you a headstrong Boromir, or a wise Faramir who knows his weakness in the face of temptation and avoids it whenever possible?

# The Schemes of the Adulteress

As we continue in our walk through Proverbs 7, Solomon now focuses his attention on the schemes of the seductress. Our young man lacking sense is walking down her street, right past her house. Solomon continues in verse 10:

And behold, a woman comes to meet him,  
Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart.

She is boisterous and rebellious;  
Her feet do not remain at home;

She is now in the streets, now in the squares,  
And lurks by every corner.

Wow! What a surprise! A woman comes to meet him! Can't you just hear Gomer Pyle exclaiming at the top of his lungs, "Surprise! Surprise! Surprise!" Surprise, indeed! This is only what was expected. Her boisterousness lends an air of fun and frivolity. Let's face it, if sin weren't so enjoyable we wouldn't fall prey to it so easily. Solomon next gives the impression that she is everywhere to be found. As I pointed out earlier, that is even more true today. Even a widely proclaimed family movie like *Forrest Gump* surprised many with scenes that were unnecessary and sexually explicit. If you were surprised, you shouldn't have been. Check these things out beforehand. Don't act like a young man lacking sense and wander down the street of temptation unaware. Remember that Jesus extended the moral law from our actions to our thought life. If we simply lust after a woman, we have already committed adultery in our hearts (Matt. 5:27-28).

Solomon next turns to the woman's tactics:

So she seizes him and kisses him,  
*(Suddenness can put you off your guard unless you have predecided what you would do, whether it is a real seduction, a scene in a movie, TV program, or book. Will you close your*

*eyes, leave, change channels, skip a few pages? What? Know beforehand!)*

And with a brazen face she says to him:

"I was due to offer peace offerings;

Today I have paid my vows.

*(I'm not such a bad person. See, I do a lot of the same things you do. You're not going to reject and judge me, are you?)*

Therefore I have come out to meet you,

To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you."

Ah, the ultimate weapon with a man: female flattery. Men are suckers when they're told that they are needed. It was he, particularly, that she was waiting for. Not just anybody. If a man senses he is needed, he will be very reluctant to say no. Men usually hate to disappoint.

Solomon continues:

"I have spread my couch with coverings,

With colored linens of Egypt.

I have sprinkled my bed

With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.

Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning;

Let us delight ourselves with caresses."

As she continues her assault on the male ego by indicating all the trouble she has gone through just for him ("Don't hurt my feelings now," she says), she creates a sensual picture that is meant to arouse him and draw him in. Be realistic. This sounds inviting, even from the pages of Scripture. This should be a loud tornado siren in your ear to tell you: "There, but for the grace of God, go I!" The adulteress finishes her seduction with the assurance that no one need ever know, in verses 19 and 20. She says:

"For the man is not at home,

He has gone on a long journey;

He has taken a bag of money with him,  
At the full moon he will come home."

This rationalization of "no one will know" is true not only of an affair, but also of what we allow into our minds through the privacy of our computer, videos rented when no one else is home, magazines stashed away in a secret place, or visits to parts of town where we certainly don't expect to find anyone we know. But it's a lie. These things cannot be hidden for a lifetime. Either you will slip up sooner or later, or you will poison your mind to such an extent that the outward temptation can no longer be resisted. Moses speaks to Israel in Numbers 32:23 warning them that if they do not obey the Lord, "their sin will find them out."

## **The Young Man Capitulates and Must Face the Consequences**

As we have seen, the young man in Proverbs 7 has walked right into temptation's snare and has been totally mesmerized by the pleas and schemes of the adulteress. I have made many parallels to today as to how prevalent sexual temptation is. Now we will see the young man's demise and the consequences of his actions. Beginning in verse 21:

With her many persuasions she entices him;  
With her flattering lips she seduces him.

Suddenly he follows her,  
*(probably as if in a trance)*  
As an ox goes to the slaughter,  
*(silently and dumbly)*  
Or as a stag goes into a trap,

Until an arrow pierces through his liver,  
As a bird hastens to the snare,

*(again blindly and without knowledge)*

So he does not know that it will cost him his life.

He capitulates without a word, mesmerized by her seduction. The analogy to the ox, the deer, and the bird point out that each of them walk blindly, silently, and unknowingly to their death. So it is with the young man lacking sense. While he will not die in a physical sense, though he may if he contracts AIDS, he will die in the sense that his life will never be the same. Not only will the shame and guilt be difficult to overcome, but there will be severed relationships that may never be repaired. There may also be consequences that can never be removed and scars that may never be healed, such as a child out of wedlock or a broken marriage in which children are the real victims. But even if the sin is with pornography, remember your sins will find you out. You may keep up appearances for awhile but your ministry, your family, and your relationship with God will slowly rot from the inside out. Solomon closes with some final warnings and observations:

Now therefore, my sons, listen to me,  
And pay attention to the words of my mouth.

Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,  
*(do not give your mind opportunity with impure material)*  
Do not stray into her paths.

For many are the victims she has cast down,  
And numerous are all her slain.

Her house is the way to Sheol,  
Descending to the chambers of death.

Your best defense is to first realize that none are immune. Remember Boromir and Faramir from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Boromir, the stronger, older brother, thought he could resist the power of the One Ring and use it to defeat the enemy. In the end, his lust for power drove him to irrationality and eventually to his death. Faramir, however, assessed his

weakness correctly and refused to even look at the Ring when the opportunity arose, knowing its seductive power. He not only lived but was used mightily in the battles that followed. No one was capable of totally resisting the power of the Ring. Those who actually gazed upon the Ring, handled it and even used it, resisted only through an extreme exercise of will often aided by the intervention and counsel of others or circumstances (Frodo, Bilbo, and Samwise). Those who totally yielded to it were destroyed by it (Gollum).

Many have faltered before you and many will come after you. Your first mistake would be to think of yourself as above this kind of sin or immune to it. Don't kid yourself. It can ruin you physically! It can ruin you emotionally! It can ruin you spiritually!

Purity affirms who we are; we are made in the image of God. Purity affirms our relationship to Jesus Christ as His bride. Purity affirms women as a treasure God created for us as a companion and helpmate and not as an object for us to conquer.

Pray and ask forgiveness for any involvement in pornography, R- rated movies, and lustful thoughts. Commit to predecide what to do about those sudden temptations, commit to purity, commit to wives and husbands (or future wives and husbands) to be faithful in the power of the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther said that you cannot stop birds from flying over your head, but you can certainly stop them from making a nest in your hair. Some temptation is unavoidable, but as far as it depends on you, give it no opportunity to set up residence in your mind.

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# Listening

## Listening: A Lost Art?

*"Listen to me!"*

*"Don't you ever listen?"*

*"Listen up!"*

*"Are you listening?"*

*"Listen carefully to what I have to say."*

*"Listen and learn."*

Do such phrases sound familiar to you? Maybe you have heard them from your parents, a teacher, a preacher, or maybe you use them with your children or other family members. They are commands or questions that emphasize the importance of listening. We all want to be heard; we believe what we have to say is significant. It is disheartening and humiliating when we are ignored.

Many years ago I witnessed a scene that has been written indelibly in my memory. It was not an event of earth-shaking importance. It was a simple exchange of time and attention between two people. One of those people was a very prominent, world-renowned pastor of one of the largest churches in the world. The other person was a church member who simply was seeking to spend a few minutes in conversation with the pastor. I don't know what the member wanted to discuss; it didn't seem to matter to the pastor. The thing that made their conversation so memorable was that many people just like the one with whom he was talking surrounded the pastor. They all wanted a few minutes of his time and attention. But instead of being distracted by many different voices, the pastor gave his full attention to one person at a time. He focused his eyes on each individual and appeared to have a genuine interest in each of them. This scene has proven to be a model for me. I have thought of it many times as I have attempted to give my

attention to anyone who seeks to be heard.

On the other hand, we have seen and experienced the opposite of this scene. Too often we are oblivious to the importance of listening. Either the one to whom we are speaking is not listening, or we are not concentrating enough on what someone else has to say to us. Have we lost the art of listening? If so, it is important that we consider how meaningful it can be to be good listeners. Within a Christian worldview, this is an essential art.

The words *listen* or *hear* and their cognates are used in the New American Standard Bible over 1,500 times. Obviously this implies that the terms are important for one who takes the Bible seriously. If we are to build a worldview that honors God, we should learn to listen.

To whom or what should we listen? Surely many answers to this question could be suggested. The art of listening is worthy of thorough discussion. But, in this discussion, I will concentrate on four facets of listening. First, we should listen to God. Second, we should listen in order to understand. Third, we should listen to the world around us. And fourth, we should listen to the non-Christian. Each of these will be offered with the hope that the development of good listening skills will lead to good communication of God's truth. If we are listening carefully, we will in turn have a hearing among those who need the message we can share.

## **Listening to God**

What would your parents, or children, or family, or friends, or coworkers say if they were asked if you listen to them? In most cases, we would like to think that such people deserve to be heard. But if you are a Christian, God should be added to such a list. Surely a Christian wants to listen to God above all others.

A Christian worldview includes the belief that God is a supernatural but personal being who communicates with us. His transcendent character does not mean that He is bound to be isolated from those He loves. That love includes the fact that He has infinite wisdom to share with His loved ones. And the wise person is one who is worthy of that description because he has learned to listen to God's wisdom.

In addition, the Christian worldview includes the glorious truth that God listens to us. As a book title states, *He is The God Who Hears*.<sup>{1}</sup> The creator and sustainer of the universe actually chooses to hear us. The Bible is clear about this. "Idols are deaf (Deut 4:28; Rev 9:20), but God is personified as having ears (1 Sam 8:21) and hearing his people (2 Sam 22:7)."<sup>{2}</sup>

Such thoughts are part of a common thread among most Christians. But those of us who have been taught the central tenets of biblical content may tend to be too comfortable with such concepts. We may have ignored the startling nature of communication with God. It can be helpful for us to realize that these beliefs are distinguishing marks of both biblical Judaism and Christianity. "Unlike ancient religions that sought revelation through the eye and through visions, biblical people primarily sought revelation through the ear and hearing. Hearing symbolizes the proper response to God in the Bible."<sup>{3}</sup> From the central proclamation of Judaism, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" (Deut. 6:4), to the familiar declaration of the Lord Jesus, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 11:15), the Bible affirms the importance of listening to the God of the Bible.

At this point we should stop and consider at least one segment of what is entailed in listening to God. That is, we are to listen to God through His Word, the Bible. "Just as human beings address God by means of language through prayer, God addresses human beings by means of language in the pages of Scripture."<sup>{4}</sup> Before we succumb to the temptation of letting

such truths pass by us, consider the dynamic implication of God addressing us in the pages of Scripture. The apostle Paul refers to this in 1 Corinthians 2:12-13:

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.*

Obviously Paul believed that what He wrote was from God through the Holy Spirit. Paul was listening to God in such a way that “we might know the things freely given to us by God.” Thus, when the Christian reads or hears the Bible, he is listening to God.

## **Listening In Order to Understand**

Have you ever had a frustrating conversation? That’s a ridiculous question, right? You can probably bring many such conversations to mind! You just were not able to “get through” to the person, or the opposite was true. Maybe one of the two of you was listening, but you just did not understand one another.

As Christians, such frustration may be the result of not cultivating the art of listening. This begins with listening to God. If we have learned to hear God through His Word, we have come to realize important elements of listening in order to understand. If we can listen to God, we are able to listen to our fellow men.

First, we realize that understanding is often the result of focus. Whether we are studying the Bible, praying, hearing a sermon, listening to family or friends, viewing a movie, or a list of other things, our attention needs to be focused. Admittedly, this can be difficult to achieve. Distractions seem to flood our lives at the most inopportune times. But how

often are such distractions a result of unnecessary additions to our lives? Have we put rugged mountains in our paths? Do we find ourselves struggling to climb those mountains before we can focus on what we truly are seeking on the other side? Perhaps we are in need of a refocusing on what is truly important, along with the discarding of what is not truly important. When this happens we will begin to walk a path that will provide more opportunities to listen in order to understand. I believe our relationships with God and those we love will deepen as a result.

The second element of understanding is patient contemplation. Some may call this meditation, which is a thoroughly biblical practice when we are meditating on Scripture. But whether we are contemplating Scripture, or what our children may have just said, our objective is to understand. Again, this also can be difficult to achieve. Because of the ways in which pop culture has permeated our lives, we have grown accustomed to immediate gratification.[\[5\]](#) This isn't surprising in light of the fact that most of what fills our ears and eyes doesn't require much, if any, patient contemplation. In fact, the things we tend to hear and see would be considered failures if we didn't respond immediately. Such pressures are indicative of the struggles of Christians in the world. According to Scripture, this will be true until Jesus returns. As a result, the Christian community is in need of those who are willing to do the hard work of patient contemplation. There is too much at stake to do otherwise.

The third element of listening in order to understand concerns the application of what is heard. When we have listened carefully enough to focus and contemplate we then are ready to use what has been heard. This is a crucial element of a Christian worldview, because in the New Testament “. . . the only marks to distinguish true hearing from purely physical hearing are faith (Matt. 8:10; 9:2; 17:20 etc.) and action (Matt. 7:16, 24, 26; Rom. 2:13 etc.).”[\[6\]](#) As Jesus said, “. .

. everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock" (Matt. 7:24). Let's aspire to be considered among the wise. God will be glorified because He will have something to say through us.

## Listening to the World Around Us

You are sitting in your doctor's office waiting to see him about a persistent cough you have had for more than two weeks. As you are thumbing through a magazine you are suddenly startled by an advertisement that proclaims, in very large letters: "YOU ARE THE C.E.O. OF YOUR LIFE!" Then you begin to read the fine print at the bottom of the ad, which states: "Think about it. Your life is like a business. It makes sense that you're the one in charge." You are thinking about it, and you do not agree. Why? Because you have been "listening" to the world around you and you realize that your world view does not fit with what you consider to be a brazen claim. You are not the C.E.O. of your life; God is. Your mental and spiritual sensitivity meter is working properly.

This fictitious scenario illustrates one of the common ways our Christian worldview guides us as we "listen" to the world around us. Many ideas are being shared in that world and many of them are contrary to Christian thought. Stephen Eyre refers to those ideas as "dragons." He believes these are cultural values that ". . . are particularly strong and absolutely deadly for the church."[\[7\]](#) Eyre identifies six of them.

The first dragon is *Materialism*. Matter is all that matters; "I am what I own." Jesus said, ". . . do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?" (Matt. 6:25)

The second dragon is *Activism*. Life is to be filled with action; "I am what I do," or "I am what I produce." God said,

“Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (Ps. 46:10).

The third dragon is *Individualism*. We can depend on no one but ourselves; “I am self-sufficient.” The apostle Peter wrote these memorable words to people, not just an individual: “. . . you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession . . .” (1 Pet. 2:9).

The fourth dragon is *Conformism*. Recognition by others is a necessity; “I am who others recognize me to be.” Jesus warned His disciples: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 6:1).

The fifth dragon is *Relativism*. It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you believe something; “I am whatever I choose to believe.” Jesus declared that what we believe about Him is what ultimately matters when He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6).

The sixth dragon is *Secularism*. Religion is all right in its place; “I am sufficient without God.” Jesus said we are not sufficient unless we have Him: “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Are we listening to the dragons, or to the Word of God? May the Lord guide us as we listen to the world around us with His ears.

## **Listening to the Non-Christian**

My ministry experiences include the privilege of travelling to the beautiful country of Slovenia. While in this formerly communist state I was invited to speak to older high school students in their classes. (Yes, they spoke and understood

English very well.) After one of these classes I engaged in conversation with several young people who were especially curious about the issues I had raised about the subject of worldviews. As I listened closely to what they were saying I realized they might have been using certain terms without much knowledge of what they mean. One of those terms was the word atheist. Some of them claimed they were atheists. So I gently asked if they understood the implications of the word by using an illustration that got their attention. Then I asked if they knew of the word agnostic. After they indicated they had not heard of the word I explained it to them. Immediately they responded by asserting that the word agnostic described them more accurately than atheist. From that point in our conversation I was able to share the gospel, the answer to their agnosticism.

As you can imagine, that incident is a joyous memory in my life. But what if I had not listened carefully, not only to what the students were saying, but what they did not say? I believe that if I had not focused my attention in order to contemplate their comments and questions, I would not have had their attention as I did.

When we are listening carefully to the non-Christian we are winning an opportunity to be heard by him. There are times when evangelism can be a matter of listening, and then telling. Here are two suggestions that can help in developing the art of listening to the non-Christian.

First, listen for what the person presupposes is true. For example, the actor Brad Pitt is quoted as saying, "I have a hard time with morals. All I know is what feels right. What's more important to me is being honest about who you are."[\[8\]](#) If you were listening to him say these things you may have wanted to encourage him to consider the implications of his statements. How would he react if someone "felt like" stealing his car or robbing his house? You also could ask him if Charles Manson was being honest about himself when he

committed murder. Brad Pitt's presuppositions about morality cannot be sustained. He needs something greater than his feelings and a vague sense of honesty.

Second, listen for what is not said. You may hear a lot of assertions, but what are the crucial elements you do not hear? Imagine you are listening to a non-Christian friend as he has a tirade about the hypocrisy of the Christians he knows (you excepted, of course). It suddenly occurs to you to ask what is behind his anger. He then becomes increasingly agitated as he tells you someone in a church rejected him and defamed his family when he was younger. Now you can begin to build up what had been torn down in your friend's life, even though a lot of patience may be required.

People need to be heard. May God grant us the wisdom to listen. In the process may He grant us the privilege of carrying His wondrous message to those who will hear.

## Notes

1. W. Bingham Hunter, *The God Who Hears* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986).
2. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, gen. eds., "Ear, Hearing," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998).
3. Ibid.
4. Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Reading Between the Lines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 18.
5. See my essays on the subjects of [Television](#) and [Slogans](#).
6. Gerhard Kittel, akouw, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. I, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 220.
7. Stephen D. Eyre, *Defeating the Dragons of the World*

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987), 14. Much of the material in this section comes from this book.

8. Brad Pitt, quoted in *Ladies Home Journal* (March 1999), 46.

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## Four Pillars of a Man's Heart – A Biblical View of True Manhood

*Lou Whitworth summarizes the key points of Stu Weber's book on this subject. He explains that biblical masculinity is lived out in four aspects of a man's life, king, warrior, mentor, and friend. Understanding these aspects can aid us in living a Christian life that fully emulates the life of Christ sharing Him with the world around us.*



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Stu Weber, in his book, *Four Pillars of a Man's Heart: Bringing Strength into Balance*,<sup>(1)</sup> states that biblical masculinity rests on four pillars. The four pillars represent the four major facets of a man's life; these aspects of masculinity are: king, warrior, mentor, and friend. Weber believes that when all four "pillars" are balanced, peace and tranquility will prevail in our marriages, our families, our churches, and in the community and the nation. These institutions rest on the balanced pillars of biblical manhood, and they all collapse when the pillars lean out of balance.

The major problems our society faces, for example, are the result of many men having one or more of their personal pillars out of balance—leaning one way or the other. For some men, the pillars have fallen down.

As we look at our society, it is clear that we are in trouble. Some of the pillars are leaning, and others have fallen down. It takes four sturdy, balanced pillars to hold up a building. "It takes four pillars to make a man. . . . who will bear the weight, stand against the elements, and hold one small civilization [a home] intact in a world that would like nothing better than to tear it down."(2)

Why is our civilization falling down around us? Because there is a war going on. The war of political correctness is part of it; sexual politics is part of it too, but it is larger than these. It is a war against the image of God. Listen as Weber draws a bead on the issue:

Gender is primarily an issue of theology. And theology is the most foundational of all the sciences. Gender is at the heart of creation. Gender is tied to the image of God. Gender is central to the glory of God. And that is precisely why the armies of hell are throwing themselves into this particular battle with such concentrated frenzy.(3)

Remember that God created mankind as male and female to be His image in the world. Thus, there is no better way to attack God and His creation or to destroy His relationship with mankind than to deface the image of God.(4) "Satan's effectiveness in destroying God's image through male-female alienation, by whatever means, has been incalculably costly to the human race."(5) This is where the current battle rages.

The first pillars started to wobble a long time ago. In the Garden of Eden, Adam began as a four-pillared man. But he disobeyed God and blamed Eve. Then the first pillar fell, and the remaining ones were weakened or compromised. For the first

time enmity and tension came into his relationship with Eve. Since then there has always been the potential of strife between the sexes. In recent years there has been a concerted effort to blur gender distinctives. But blurring gender differences results in disintegration, disorientation, destruction, and death. No society that persists at it will survive. The answer is to return to the instruction book, the Bible.

The purpose of Weber's book is to point the way for men to become all they should be biblically so that they and their wives and children can flourish in an often hostile world. Weber writes:

What kind of man builds a civilization, a small civilization that outlives him? What kind of man has shoulders broad enough to build upon? A four-pillared man:

A man of vision and character . . . a King.

A man of strength and power . . . a Warrior.

A man of faith and wisdom . . . a Mentor.

A man of heart and love . . . a Friend.(6)

## **Man as Shepherd-King**

In Stu Weber's new book, *Four Pillars of a Man's Heart*, the "first pillar" represents the kingly aspect of man's nature.

The king, as pictured by Weber, is a Shepherd-king. This figure is modeled after Jesus Christ, the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings, who sometimes spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd. The first pillar in Weber's book, therefore, is the pillar of the Shepherd-King who combines the position of a king with the heart of a shepherd.

Weber's key thought about the king or shepherd-king is that he is a provider, though it is a very broad conception of provision. If we say, "He is a good provider," we mean, "He makes a good living," or meets the *physical* needs of the

family. The meaning here, however, is that the shepherd-king looks out for *all* the needs of his flock—emotional, physical, social, spiritual. The kingly man is looking ahead and planning for ways to meet tomorrow's needs as well as today's. His has a *vision to provide* the resources for the needs of his family.

Among the minimum requirements of the Shepherd-king is work to do that provides for the family. He works hard at whatever it is and stays with it. The work may not be exciting or glamorous, but he shoulders the load and provides for the little flock God has entrusted to him. His wife may work for paycheck; she may even make more than he does, but no matter what she does, the *obligation and the burden of provision* is his, to see that it is done.

Another major duty of the shepherd-king is to provide direction for the family. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (7) A shepherd-king points the way for his flock, followers, and his family. To lead or set the pace, one doesn't need to be a master of every skill or field of knowledge. For example, Lee Iacocca doesn't need to be a great mechanic; he can hire the best. What he does best is set the policies, give the company direction, and make sure the infrastructure is in place to make the automobiles. In the same way, the man with a king's heart doesn't have to know everything, but he is expected to set the tone, the boundaries, and point the way for the flock.

The king in a man cares deeply about every aspect of his family. He models by actions and words biblical standards of behavior. He is gracious and just. He shows justice, mercy, and honor to everyone he meets.

A shepherd-king never abandons his flock. To do so is to violate the most basic ingredient of his calling to—protect. To abandon one's flock is cowardice, the equivalent of desertion in time of war.

The shepherd-king figure could also be called the servant-king. This is based on Christ's service to his disciples.

If the king pillar is not in balance, it leans to one extreme or another. He becomes either a tyrant who uses his strength to force people to do his bidding, or an abdicator who is weak, passive, or absent (whether in fact or in effect). Such a man's kingdom is filled with disorder, chaos, family dysfunction, or oppression. When the king pillar is in balance in a man's life, harmony and tranquility are possible in the home and the community.

Next, we will discuss the second pillar which represents the warrior aspect of man's makeup.

## **Man as Warrior**

The primary duty of the warrior is to defend and guard his flock. Though he is primarily a protector of his family, he is also the protector of his church, the wider community or nation, and the weak and powerless.

The author's models for the warrior are Christ and David. Weber reminds us of the passage in Revelation 19 in which Christ, as a knight riding a white horse, leads the armies of heaven into battle. David was a bold and courageous fighter, but was also a man after God's own heart.

The warrior in a godly man doesn't love war. But, because he is a man of high moral standards and principles, he is willing to *live by* those principles and moral standards, spend himself for them, and, if necessary, *die for* them.

The warrior is not a popular figure in today's society. This attitude is understandable, particularly from those who have experienced life around men whose warrior pillar has leaned toward the brute. Women and children need to be protected from such men by faithful warriors whose lives are in balance.

Though the concern many have about the strong side of man's nature (king, warrior) is understandable to a degree, it can't be wished away. Someone once remarked that when most men are soft, a few hard men will rule. The reality is that the warrior is here to stay. So, the answer is not to deny the fact, but to channel the warrior energy to constructive ends.

The warrior in a man can be a great asset, but if the pillar of the warrior is out of balance, the situation can become disastrous. Consequently, the warrior must be under the authority of God because his energy needs to be focused, and the Holy Spirit must be allowed full control over his mind, soul, and body.

There is no such thing as a soldier or warrior without a line of authority. Even if no specific orders are in effect, every soldier is under the authority of what is called "general orders," such as: "walk your post," "be alert," "remain on station until relieved," etc. In a similar manner all Christian men are under general orders from the Lord of Hosts. We are "to spend time with the Lord," "to love our wives at all costs," "to bring up our children to know and honor God," and "to be involved in the local church." God's warrior is not a mercenary; he is under God's authority. God's warrior remains on call. Oh, sure, he takes some needed rest and recreation, but at the first sign of need or danger, he reports for duty. He never becomes passive or careless during on his watch. On or off duty, he is alert for any threat to his flock.

A warrior's life is full of sacrifice; he is called to sacrifice himself for his wife, his children, his church, the spiritually lost, and the weak and helpless. He sometimes finds it necessary to sacrifice his popularity by saying and doing the hard things that others won't say. On the other hand, the godly warrior has a heart of mercy for the weak and the helpless. The price of being a warrior is high, but the rewards are great.

The third pillar represents the mentoring role inherent in a balanced man's nature.

## **Man as Mentor**

The primary function of the mentor is to teach. Weber's key concept is that the mentor has something valuable (i.e., life wisdom) that is important to pass on to others. That process can be as formal and conscious as a Bible scholar instructing a seminary class of eager young men. Or, it can be as informal and unconscious as the ongoing presence of an older, more experienced man working beside a boy or a younger man. Said another way, mentoring can take the form of modeling over time (even a lifetime), instinctive coaching (at appropriate times), or systematic teaching (at scheduled times). Jesus, for example, used all three methods of mentoring.

The mentor's core characteristic is the fact that he communicates transparently with the person he is mentoring. He imparts himself and his knowledge without undue self-consciousness. In other words, he is transparent enough to share his successes, and even his failures, if these experiences will edify his students. If a mentor fails to pass on the baton of knowledge or wisdom, then he has not succeeded in his role.

Weber emphatically believes that there is a mentor in every man's heart; that is, the potential for mentoring is inherent within us. Many men, however, are nervous about this and feel unqualified. But, in reality, we are all involved in mentoring already in one way or another, whether we realize it or not.

Mentoring is basically passing on the secrets of life: lessons from our life experiences. The purpose of mentoring is straightforward: mentoring builds men who understand life and pass their knowledge on to others. The attitude and posture of a good mentor is quite transferable to others because mentoring has its own built in process of duplication. In

other words, when it is done well it is very duplicatable because it has already been modeled by the mentor. The expression, "It's easier caught than taught," can apply here. The goal of mentoring is to advance an ever increasing network of mentored mentors who will keep passing on their life wisdom to others. It helps us understand why Jesus spent so much time with 12 men, doesn't it? He apparently thought that mentoring a group of men was the most productive way of leaving a lasting and ongoing legacy. The fact that His message has spread to most areas of the globe and has persisted for 2000 years illustrates that He was correct.

It should be an encouragement to comprehend that God can use both the good and the bad experiences from our lives to help others. And, we all have a measure of wisdom and experience to share. However, just because we are capable of mentoring at some level just as we are, we should not conclude that we can't or shouldn't try to improve as mentors. One of the primary ways for us to improve as mentors is to grow in our knowledge of the Bible. When our life experiences are filtered through a deep knowledge of the Bible and a life lived for Christ, then our mentoring potential is greatly enhanced. The consequence of vast networks of men mentoring others who will in turn mentor others can change the world.

Finally, we will look at man's role as friend to other men. This is the fourth pillar.

## **Man as Friend**

The primary function of a friend is "to connect," that is, to link hearts. Someone is a true friend if that person loves to connect, or to link one heart, with another. A true friend is one who, in spite of his own needs at the time, connects deliberately with another who has a need or a burden. He doesn't just connect when it's convenient and he feels like it. If a man is unable or unwilling to connect, he has failed in his primary duty as a friend.

To truly connect in deep friendship or to minister to hurting people, we must be not be afraid of a rich variety of emotions—whether they be the emotions of others or our own. It is just here that many men have difficulty. We can usually express anger, but other emotions are tougher. Weber believes that *allowing* (notice the word) himself to weep (in appropriate situations) was a milestone in his life. He suggests that many men need to be able to weep and to express other emotions as well. In fact, it appears that for many men, allowing themselves to weep breaks up the emotional logjam in their lives and gives them a new sense of freedom. Follow the author's thoughts as he explains how he felt after witnessing the birth of his youngest son:

For the first time in my memory, I wept uncontrollably. . . . Me? Crying in front of people? Stu Weber, the football captain. The Airborne Ranger. The Green Beret trooper. The man. Bawling like a kid? Oh, I had cried before somewhere along the line. . . . But this was different. New. There was no shame, and there was lots of connection.(8)

He goes on to add:

*And I have to admit something else. . . . Emotions are such a great gift from God. And after a lifetime of stuffing them for athletic, military, and "manly" purposes, I love them.(9)*

He sides against what he calls *emotionalism*, but calls for men to learn to express and enjoy real emotions. As an older soldier, with nothing left to prove, he could finally face his humanity and embrace the honest, clean emotions that earlier he had always stifled. If we do so, our ability to connect as a true friend will be greatly enhanced.

## **Man's Best Friend**

Men need friends, but many American men have only acquaintances and no close friends. Thankfully, there is

already a Friend out there looking for us, the Ultimate Friend, Jesus Christ. No discussion of friendship, then, would be complete without referring to Him. Our Ultimate Friend has been trying to connect with us, because He wants a relationship with us. Even the best human friend will disappoint us and let us down, but once connected with us, the Lord will never leave us or forsake us.

If our relationship with the Lord were dependent on our own steadfastness, then we'd have a reason to fear. Fortunately, the Lord who sought us can keep us safe because nothing can steal us from the Lord's hand (John 10:29).

There is, my friend, somewhere down inside you, the power to connect. There is in every man's chest a friend, and emotionally connecting friend. Find yours. Unchain him. And find life on a richer level than you'd ever dreamed possible.(10)

## Notes

1. Stu Weber, *Four Pillars of A Man's Heart: Bringing Strength into Balance* (Sisters, Ore.:Multnomah, 1997), 13.
2. Ibid., 13.
3. Ibid., 39.
4. Ibid., (Halverson, cited in *Four Pillars*, p. 39)
5. Ibid, Halverson, 40.
6. Weber, 13.
7. Joshua 24:15
8. Weber, 229.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 237.

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# Ten Lies of Feminism: A Christian Perspective

*Sue Bohlin examines how this prevalent view of women measures up from a biblical perspective.*

This essay examines the ten lies of feminism that Dr. Toni Grant suggests in her book *Being a Woman*.[{1}](#)

*At its inception, the feminist movement, accompanied by the sexual revolution, made a series of enticing, exciting promises to women. These promises sounded good, so good that many women deserted their men and their children or rejected the entire notion of marriage and family, in pursuit of “themselves” and a career. These pursuits, which emphasized self-sufficiency and individualism, were supposed to enhance a woman’s quality of life and improve her options, as well as her relations with men. Now, a decade or so later, women have had to face the fact that, in many ways, feminism and liberation made promises that could not be delivered.*[{2}](#)

## Lie #1: Women Can Have It All

The first lie is that women can have it all. We were fed an illusion that women, being the superior sex, have an inexhaustible supply of physical and emotional energy that enable us to juggle a career, family, friendships and volunteer service. Proponents of feminism declared that not only *can* women do what men do, but we *ought* to do what men do. Since men can’t do what women can do—have babies—this put a double burden on women. It wasn’t enough that women were already exhausted from the never-ending tasks of child-rearing and homemaking; we were told that women needed to be in the work force as well, contributing to the family financially.

Scripture presents a different picture for men and women. The

Bible appears to make a distinction between each gender's primary energies. The commands to women are generally in the realm of our relationships, which is consistent with the way God made women to be primarily relational, being naturally sensitive to others and usually valuing people above things. Scripture never forbids women to be gainfully employed; in fact, the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is engaged in several part-time business ventures, in real estate and manufacturing. Nonetheless, it is the excellent care of her husband, her children, her home and her community that inspires the praise she is due. Titus 2 instructs older women to mentor younger women, and teach them to care for their husbands and children and homemaking responsibilities. The God-given strengths of a woman were given to bring glory to God through her womanly differences

## **Lie #2: Men and Women are Fundamentally the Same**

Apart from some minor biological differences, feminism strongly suggested that males and females are fundamentally the same. Culture, it announced, was responsible for turning human blank slates into truck-wielding boys and doll-toting girls. This lie has been very effective at changing the culture. My husband Ray and I offer a seminar at Probe's *Mind Games* conferences called "Guys Are From Mars, Girls Are From Venus," where we go over the major differences between the sexes. Men, for instance, tend to be more goal-oriented and competitive, where women are more relational and cooperative. Men are active; women are verbal. This is intuitively obvious to the adults in our audience, but it is often new news to high school and college students. We find adults nodding with smiles of recognition, some of them nudging each other in the ribs. In the younger members of the audience, though, we see "the lights come on" in their eyes as they are exposed to something that is obvious and they probably already knew was true, but feminism's worldview had been feeding them a lie.

They have been so immersed in this cultural myth that they had accepted it without question. One young man came up to me after a session and said he totally disagreed with me, that there are no real differences between males and females. I asked him if he treated his guy friends the same way he treated his girl friends, and he said, "Of course!" I asked, "And this doesn't cause you any problems?" He said no. With a smile, I suggested he come talk to me in ten years after he'd had a chance to experience real life!

The truth is that God created significant differences between males and females. We can see evidence of this in the fact that Scripture gives different commands for husbands and wives, which are rooted in the differing needs and divinely-appointed roles of men and women.

## **Lie #3: Desirability is Enhanced by Achievement**

The third lie of feminism is that the more a woman achieves, the more attractive and desirable she becomes to men. The importance of achievement to a man's sense of self—an element of masculinity that is, we believe, God-given—was projected onto women. Feminism declared that achieving something, making a mark in the world, was the only measure of success that merited the respect of others. Women who believed this myth found themselves competing with men. Now, competition is appropriate in the business and professional world, but it's disastrous in relationships.

Men do respect and admire accomplished women, just as they do men, but personal relationships operate under a different set of standards. Men most appreciate a woman's unique feminine attributes: love, sensitivity, her abilities to relate. Women have been shocked to discover that their hard-won accomplishments haven't resulted in great relationships with men. Sometimes, being overeducated hampers a woman's ability

to relate to men. Men's egos are notoriously fragile, and they are by nature competitive. It's threatening to many men when a woman achieves more, or accomplishes more, or knows more than they do. Feminism didn't warn women of the double standard in relationships: that achievement can and does reap benefits in our careers, but be a stumbling block in our relationships.

The question naturally arises, then, Is it bad for a woman to have a higher degree of education than the man in a relationship? Is it troublesome when a woman is smarter than the man? Should a woman "dumb down" in order to get or keep her man? In the words of the apostle Paul, "May it never be!" A woman living up to the potential of her God-given gifts brings glory to God; it would be an insult to our gracious God to pretend those gifts aren't there. The answer is for women to understand that many men feel threatened and insecure about this area of potential competition, and maintain an attitude of humility and sensitivity about one's strengths; as Romans exhorts us, "Honor[ing] one another above yourselves" (12:10).

Not surprisingly, God already knew about the disparity between the sexes on the issue of achievement. Throughout the Bible, men are called to trust God as they achieve whatever God has called them to do. It's important for men to experience personal significance by making a mark on the world. But God calls women to trust Him in a different area: in our relationships. A woman's value is usually not in providing history-changing leadership and making great, bold moves, but in loving and supporting those around us, changing the world by touching hearts. Once in a while, a woman does make her mark on a national or global scale: consider the biblical judge Deborah, Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, and Indira Gandhi. But women like these are the exception, not the rule. And we don't have to feel guilty for not being "exceptional."

## Lie #4: The Myth of One's "Unrealized Potential"

Lie number four says that all of us—but especially women—have tremendous potential that simply *must* be realized. To feminism's way of thinking, just being average isn't acceptable: you must be *great*.

This causes two problems. First, women are deceived into thinking they are one of the elite, the few, the special. Reality, though, is that most women are ordinary, one of the many. All of us are uniquely gifted by God, but few women are given visible, high-profile leadership roles, which tend to be the only ones that feminism deems valuable. We run into trouble when we're operating under a set of beliefs that don't coincide with reality!

Consequently, many women are operating under unrealistically high expectations of themselves. When life doesn't deliver on their hopes, whether they be making class valedictorian, beauty pageant winner, company president, or neurosurgeon, women are set up for major disappointment. Just being a cog in the wheel of your own small world isn't enough.

This brings us to the second problem. A lot of women beat themselves up for not accomplishing greatness. Instead of investing their life's energies in doing well those things they *can* do, they grieve what and who they are *not*. Just being good, or being good at what they do, isn't enough if they're not the *best*.

Romans 12:3 tells us, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought." Rather than worrying about our unrealized potential for some sort of nebulous greatness, we ought to be concerned about being faithful and obedient in the things God has given us to do, trusting Him for the ultimate results. And we ought to not worry about being ordinary as if there were some stigma to it. Scripture says that God is pleased to use

ordinary people, because that's how He gets the most glory. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.) There is honor in being an ordinary person in the hand of an extraordinary God.

## **Lie #5: Sexual Sameness**

The fifth lie of feminism is that men and women are the same sexually. This lie comes to us courtesy of the same evil source that brought us the lies of the sexual revolution.

The truth is that women can't separate sex from love as easily as men can. For women, sex needs to be an expression of love and commitment. Without these qualities, sex is demeaning, nothing more than hormones going crazy.

The cost of sex is far greater for women than for men. Sex outside of a committed, loving relationship—I'm talking about marriage here—often results in unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and profound heartbreak. Every time a woman gives her body away to a man, she gives a part of her heart as well. Sexual "freedom" has brought new degrees of heartache to millions of women. The lie of sexual equality has produced widespread promiscuity and epidemic disease. No wonder so many women are struggling with self-esteem!

God's commands concerning sex take into account the fact that men and women are not the same sexually or any other way. He tells us to exercise self-control before marriage, saving all sexual expression for the constraints of a marriage relationship, and then to keep the marriage bed pure once we are married. When we follow these guidelines, we discover that God's laws provide protection for women: the security of a committed relationship, freedom from sexual health worries, and a stable environment for any children produced in the union. This high standard also protects men by providing a safe channel for their sexual energies. Both chaste single men, and faithful husbands, are kept safe from sexual diseases, unwanted pregnancies with women other than their

wives, and the guilt of sexual sin.

## Lie #6: The Denial of Maternity

Many women postponed marriage and childbearing to pursue their own personal development and career goals. This perspective denies the reality of a woman's reproductive system and the limitations of time. Childbearing is easier in a woman's 20s and 30s than in her 40s. Plus, there is a physical cost; science has borne out the liabilities that older women incur for themselves and their babies. Midlife women are more prone to have problems getting pregnant, staying pregnant, and then experiencing difficult deliveries. The risk of conceiving a child with Down's Syndrome is considerably higher in older mothers.<sup>{3}</sup> Fertility treatment doesn't work as well for women over 40.<sup>{4}</sup>

There is also a spiritual dimension to denying maternity. When women refuse their God-ordained roles and responsibilities, they open themselves to spiritual deception and temptations. 1 Timothy 2:15 is an intriguing verse: "But women will be saved through childbearing." One compelling translation for this verse is, "Women will be *kept safe* through childbearing," where Paul uses the word for *childbearing* as a sort of shorthand for the woman's involvement in the domestic sphere—having her "focus on the family," so to speak.<sup>(5)</sup> When a married woman's priorities are marriage, family and the home, she is kept safe—protected—from the consequences of delaying motherhood and the temptations that beleaguer a woman trying to fill a man's role. For example, I know one married woman who chose to pursue a full-time career in commercial real estate, to the detriment of her family. She confessed that she found herself constantly battling the temptation to lust on two fronts: sexual lust for the men in her office and her clients, and lust for the recognition and material things that marked success in that field. Another friend chose her career over having any children at all, and discovered that

like the men in her field, she could not separate her sense of self from her job, and it ultimately cost her her marriage and her life as she knew it. The problem isn't having a career: the problem is when a woman gets her priorities out of balance.

## **Lie #7: To Be Feminine Is To Be Weak**

In the attempt to blur gender distinctions, feminists declared war on the concept of gender-related characteristics. The qualities that marked feminine women—softness, sweetness, kindness, the ability to relate well—were judged as silly, stupid and weak. Only what characterized men—characteristics like firmness, aggressiveness, competitiveness—were deemed valuable.

But when women try to take on male qualities, the end result is a distortion that is neither feminine nor masculine. A woman is perceived as shrill, not spirited. What is expected and acceptable aggression in a man is perceived as unwelcome brashness in a woman. When women try to be tough, it is often taken as unpleasantness. Unfortunately, there really is a strong stereotype about “what women should be like” that merits being torn down. A lot of men are threatened by strong women with opinions and agendas of their own, and treat them with undeserved disrespect. But it is not true that traditionally masculine characteristics are the only ones that count.

There really is a double standard operating, because the characteristics that constitute masculinity and femininity are separate and different, and they are not interchangeable. To be feminine is a special kind of strength. It's a different, appealing kind of power that allows a woman to influence her world in a way quite distinct from the way a man influences the world. It pleased the Lord to create woman to complement man, not to compete with him or be a more rounded copy of him. 1 Corinthians 11:7 says that man is the image and glory of

God, but woman is the glory of man. Femininity isn't weakness; it's the glorious, splendid crown on humanity.

## Lie #8: Doing is Better Than Being

In his book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*[{6}](#), John Gray pointed out that men get their sense of self from achievement, and women get their sense of self from relationships. Feminism declared that the male orientation of *what you do* was the only one that mattered; *who you are*, and how important you are to the people in your world, didn't count for as much.

This lie said that active is good, passive is bad. Traditional feminine behaviors of being passive and receptive were denounced as demeaning to women and ineffective in the world. Only being the initiator counted, not being the responder. "To listen, to be there, to receive the other with an open heart and mind—this has always been one of the most vital roles of woman. Most women do this quite naturally, but many have come to feel uneasy in this role. Instead, they work frantically on assertiveness, aggression, personal expression, and power, madly suppressing their feminine instincts of love and relatedness."[{7}](#)

Women's roles in the family, the church, and the world are a combination of being a responder and an initiator. As a responder, a wife honors her husband through loving submission, and a woman serves the church through the exercise of her spiritual gifts. As an initiator and leader, a woman teaches her children and uses her abilities in the world, such as the woman of Proverbs 31. God's plan is for us to live a balanced life—sometimes active, sometimes passive; sometimes the initiator, sometimes the responder; at all times, submitting both who we are and what we do to the Lordship of Christ.

## **Lie #9: The Myth of Self-Sufficiency**

The ninth lie is the myth of self-sufficiency. Remember the famous feminist slogan that appeared on everything from bumper stickers to t-shirts to notepads? “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.” The message was clear: women don’t need men, who are inferior anyway. The world would be a better place if women ran it: no wars, no greed, no power plays, just glorious cooperation and peace.

The next step after “women don’t need men” was logical: women don’t need anybody. We can take care of ourselves. Helen Reddy’s hit song “I Am Woman” became feminism’s theme song, with the memorable chorus, “If I have to, I can do anything / I am strong / I am invincible / I am woman!”

Of course, if women don’t need anybody except themselves, they certainly don’t need God. Particularly a masculine, patriarchal God who makes rules they don’t like and insists that He alone is God. But the need to worship is deeply ingrained in us, so feminist thought gave rise to goddess worship. The goddess was just a female image to focus on; in actuality, goddess worship is worship of oneself.[\[8\]](#)

The lie of self-sufficiency is the same lie that Satan has been deceiving us with since the Garden of Eden: What do you need God for? We grieve the Lord’s heart when we believe this lie. Jeremiah 2:13 says, “My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” God made us for Himself; believing the lie of self-sufficiency isn’t only futile, it’s a slap in God’s face.

## **Lie #10: Women Would Enjoy the Feminization of Men**

The tenth lie of feminism is that women would enjoy the feminization of men. Feminists believed that the only way to

achieve equality of the sexes was to do away with *role* distinctions. Then they decided that that wasn't enough: society had to do away with *gender* distinctions, or at the very least blur the lines. Women embraced more masculine values, and men were encouraged to embrace more feminine characteristics. That was supposed to fix the problem. It didn't.

As men tried to be "good guys" and accommodate feminists' demands, the culture saw a new type of man emerge: sensitive, nurturing, warmly compassionate, yielding. The only problem was that this "soft man" wasn't what women wanted. Women pushed men to be like women, and when they complied, nobody respected them. Women, it turns out, want to be the soft ones—and we want men to be strong and firm and courageous; we want a manly man. When men start taking on feminine characteristics, they're just wimpy and unmasculine, not pleasing themselves or the women who demanded the change. There is a good reason that books and movies with strong, masculine heroes continue to appeal to such a large audience. Both men and women respond to men who fulfill God's design for male leadership, protection, and strength.

Underlying the women's liberation movement is an angry, unsubmitive attitude that is fueled by the lies of deception. It's good to know what the lies are, but it's also important to know what God's word says, so we can combat the lies with the power of His truth.

## Notes

1. Toni Grant, *Being a Woman: Fulfilling Your Femininity and Finding Love*. New York: Random House, 1988.

2. Ibid, 3.

3. March of Dimes, "Pregnancy After 35," [www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/14332\\_1155.asp](http://www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/14332_1155.asp).

4. Jodi Panayotov, "IVF & Older Women – How Successful is IVF After 40?" [ezinearticles.com/?IVF-and-Older-Women-How-Successful-is-IVF-After-40?&id=636335](http://ezinearticles.com/?IVF-and-Older-Women-How-Successful-is-IVF-After-40?&id=636335).

5. Andreas Kostenberger, "Saved Through Childbearing?" (*CBMW [The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood] News*, Sept. 1997), p. 3.

6. John Gray, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

7. Grant, 9.

8. Mary Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1992), p. 159.

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## Depression

*Jerry Solomon offers a compassionate, holistic examination of depression from a Christian perspective, with helpful suggestions for those who long to help.*

### One Person's Story

Depression—a word that is used frequently in our time. Does it apply to you, someone you love, or someone you know? Since 17 percent of the population suffers from major depression at some point in their lives,<sup>[1](#)</sup> it is probable you have been touched by it in some way. Perhaps the following account will “ring true” in light of your experiences. (This story really happened, but the name of the character has been changed.)

For many years Stan, an evangelical Christian, struggled with

varying degrees of depression. These bouts were incapacitating on occasion, irritating or highly frustrating sometimes, but always persistent in their visits. Eventually the struggle came to a crisis point. He was not able to respond to any emotional stimulus that was offered; he had totally isolated himself from family, friends, and work. In retrospect he realized this isolation was done purposefully. The true causes of his struggle had never been addressed, and he was tired of pulling himself out of one depressed state only to find another staring him in the face. So he refused to repeat the pattern that had plagued him for so many years. It was time to find the root causes, instead of repeatedly dodging them.

After talking with a good friend who was a counselor, he decided he should consider admitting himself to a psychiatric hospital. He immediately contacted such a place and entered the "first phase," or initial analysis prior to admittance. This analysis indicated he should become a patient. The next day he became part of an extraordinary program of discovery that was to last more than three weeks. In fact, those weeks were so extraordinary, he will tell you they provided the impetus for dramatic, positive change in his life and thought.

During those days of concentration, Stan dealt with several important issues that subsequently have led to a more stable life. First, he faced the trauma of abuse he had experienced. Second, through the ministry of a compassionate chaplain and a counselor, he realized he was weary of learning about God, without at the same time knowing God in the personal way the Bible frequently indicates. He was hungry to couple Biblical precepts with personal experience. Third, the sense of community among those in the hospital with him led him to consider the social "games" he had been playing in his evangelical Christian setting outside the hospital. Even though many of the patients were not Christians, that did not deter them from intimacy, trust, and truth. There were no hidden agendas, no political posturing, no hypocritical

fronts. They listened to one another, cried together, encouraged one another, challenged one another, laughed together, and even disciplined one another. Fourth, Stan was challenged to consider whether he should take medication in light of his trust in God's healing power. He was put on medication that is still part of his life after eight years. Fifth, he was led to consider his thought life, especially as it applied to expectations he had of himself.

Unfortunately, there are many Christians who continue to wrestle with what Winston Churchill called the "black dog" of depression. They struggle without finding help. This essay is offered with the hope that it will encourage those who need help, and that it will prompt many to respond with patience and love to those who are depressed.

## **Who Suffers with Depression?**

Some have said depression is "the common cold of emotional disorders, and it appears to be on the rise. People of both genders get depressed, although women are twice as likely as men to suffer from major depressive disorders."[\[2\]](#) Who are these people? As we will see, they are both famous and infamous people; they are normal people; they are even people we know from the Bible.

Depression can be described as "a condition of general emotional dejection and withdrawal; sadness greater and more prolonged than that warranted by any objective reason."[\[3\]](#) Dejection, withdrawal, sadness, and other similar terms are familiar to many. Vincent Van Gogh, Abraham Lincoln, Edgar Allen Poe, Marilyn Monroe, Rod Steiger, Mike Wallace, and many other notable people have struggled with depression. In 1972 Senator Thomas Eagleton acknowledged his depression, and the Democrats dropped him as the Vice Presidential candidate. In 1995 Alma Powell, the wife of General Colin Powell, revealed her history of depression, and her husband urged others to get help.[\[4\]](#) Martin Luther and Charles Spurgeon, two great men in

the history of the church, frequently lived with the dark shadow of despondency.

Even some great biblical characters wrestled with depression. At one point in his life, Moses wanted to die (Exodus 32:32). While struggling with his suffering, Job “cursed the day of his birth” (3:1). He said, “I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul” (7:11). In addition, he cried, “My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me” (17:1). Elijah was incapacitated with depression soon after he had been an integral player in one of the great demonstrations of God’s power (I Kings 19). After Jonah witnessed the astounding grace of God among the wicked Ninevites, he angrily said, “Death is better to me than life” (Jonah 4:3). The great prophet Jeremiah declared, “Why did I ever come forth from the womb to look on trouble and sorrow?” (Jeremiah 20:18)

The amazing prophecy of Isaiah 53:3 states that the Suffering Servant, the Lord Jesus, was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” *Sorrows* and *grief* can refer to both physical and mental pain, which could include depression.[\[5\]](#) Consider the thoughts of Lydia Child, the 19th century abolitionist, in light of Isaiah 53:

Whatever is highest and holiest is tinged with melancholy. The eye of genius has always a plaintive expression, and its natural language is pathos. A prophet is sadder than other men; and He who was greater than all the prophets was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”[\[6\]](#)

A well-known spiritual says, “No one knows the trouble I’ve seen,” a sentiment that is understood by those who are depressed. J.B. Phillips, author of the classic *Your God is Too Small*, dealt with depression all his life. In one of his many letters, he offered these comments to one who also was struggling: “As far as you can, and God knows how difficult this is, try to relax in and upon Him. As far as my experience

goes, to get even a breath of God's peace in the midst of pain is infinitely worth having."[{7}](#)

We have seen that depression has been experienced since ancient times. No one is immune, but, praise God, those in His family are not alone. The Lord Himself is with us.

## Depression: Symptoms and Explanations

- *I feel so tired!*
- *I feel weak; my arms are heavy.*
- *I feel so agitated!*
- *I feel anxious about everything, it seems.*
- *I feel so fearful—of death, of tomorrow, of people.*
- *I can't concentrate!*
- *I can't remember things I used to remember.*
- *I can't face people; I want to be alone.*
- *I'm not interested in sex anymore.*
- *I can't sleep!*
- *I sleep to escape!*
- *I only eat because I have to.*[{8}](#) • *I hate myself!*
- *I feel angry all the time!*
- *Everything and everyone is stupid!*

Such comments are familiar to those who are dealing with depression. Usually these phrases are not descriptive of what is objectively true, but they are descriptive of how a depressed person is responding to his predicament. One who hears them can be tempted to dismiss the one who made the statements with well-meaning but trite responses that betray a lack of understanding. It often is difficult for someone who has not wrestled with depression to understand.

So how can we understand? Why does a person get depressed? There is no simple answer to this question, contrary to what some people think. As Dr. John White has written, "Depression has many faces. It cannot be relieved on the basis of one simple formula, arising as it does by numerous and complex

mechanisms, and plummeting sometimes to depths where its victims are beyond the reach of verbal communication. There are mysteries about it which remain unsolved. No one theoretical framework is adequate to describe it.”{9} It is meaningful for a Christian to understand this. Sometimes a response to the depressed can focus on a principle without regard for the person. For example, the 17th century English bishop Jeremy Taylor wrote: “It is impossible for that man to despair who remembers that his Helper is omnipotent.”{10} This assumes that remembering something will automatically change one’s thoughts and feelings. The person who is depressed doesn’t necessarily make that connection. Mentally healthy people have reasonable thought processes, but they are not the norm in a depressed person’s clouded life. “Mental health is like physical health. We are all vulnerable to its loss.”{11} A truly depressed person is not mentally healthy.

As we have stated, there is no one all-encompassing answer to the “Why?” of depression. But there are a number of models that suggest answers.

- Aggression turned inward, or unexpressed anger.
- Object loss, as in the loss of a parent.
- Loss of self-esteem.
- Incorrect thinking.
- Learned helplessness, or inability to respond to unpleasant experiences.
- Loss of reinforcement, as in lack of sympathy.
- Loss of role status, as in loss of power or prestige.
- Loss of meaning of existence.
- Impairment of brain chemistry, as in neurotransmitters.
- Neurophysiological malfunction of brain cells.{12}

When we ponder these models in the light of a Christian worldview, we find that none of them can stand alone. Each one taken separately reduces us to only one element, whereas a Christian worldview sees man holistically. Man is not to be seen solely as a product of his past, his thought life, his

societal conditioning, or his biology. The one who is depressed should be approached as Christ would: as a whole person made in God's image.

## Depression and the Whole Person

"What is man, that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" These memorable phrases from Psalm 8 pose crucial questions in regard to the subject of depression. The answers we give to such questions will provide a beginning point for responding to those who are depressed. As Leslie Stevenson has written, "The prescription for a problem depends on the diagnosis of the basic cause."[\[13\]](#) A Christian is challenged to consider a prescription for depression that sees both the material and immaterial aspects of a total person. Such considerations lead to concerns as to whether one should take medication, submit to some type of psychological analysis, or simply trust God to provide healing. Or, as a prominent Christian psychiatrist asks, "Is [depression] a disease of the mind or of the body?"[\[14\]](#) Is it both/and, or either/or? These are issues that tend to stir controversy among Christians. Too frequently the controversy is focused on "clumsy clichés, ...subtly damning exhortations, breezy banalities, and the latest idiocy in pop psychology. Or else...unnecessary pills."[\[15\]](#)

The history of the church demonstrates that one of the reasons for such a response is found in an ancient struggle between Greek and Hebrew influences. More often than not we tend to side with the Greeks and divide humans "into a less important physical part (body and brain) and a more important immaterial part (mind and soul)."[\[16\]](#) This unbiblical division creates problems, because "just as music is more than the orchestra that plays it, so I am more than my body."[\[17\]](#) I am also more than my mind and soul.

When this unity of human nature is ignored two extreme views can be found among Christians. "One is that we submit to all

suffering, sickness, pain—whether mental or physical—as from God.”[\[18\]](#) The other asserts that “through the exercise of faith and by the power of Jesus’ name we can banish every sickness, every difficulty. Sickness, tragedy, pain must be resisted, for all come from Satan. Unhappiness is a sign of defeat and unbelief.”[\[19\]](#) This means that seeking help from physicians, psychologists, or psychiatrists “is a tacit admission that the resources in Christ and the Scripture are inadequate.”[\[20\]](#) Both of these views are too simplistic, but there are certainly elements of the truth in them. How can we reconcile them?

Quite simply and obviously, the one who is depressed should be treated as a whole person. Consider the statements of John White, a practicing Christian psychiatrist, author of a thought-provoking book on depression and suicide entitled *The Masks of Melancholy*, and many other books. He wrote:

I will no more treat mind as distinct from body than body as distinct from mind. By the grace of God I will treat persons, not pathology, sinners rather than syndromes, and individuals rather than illnesses. And however primitive our weapons may be, there are effective weapons and we must use them.[\[21\]](#)

As one who has fought with depression, I have come to realize the wisdom of Dr. White’s comments. The treatment I have received has come from family, friends, physicians, psychologists, and psychiatrists who understand how God has created us. Their compassionate, godly responses to my struggle have been instrumental in my recovery. To paraphrase the apostle Paul, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of [them]” (Philippians 1:3). They were the Lord’s servants in my time of need.

## Responding to Depression

Sarah’s husband has been isolating himself from her for

several weeks. He won't communicate with her. He doesn't eat much. He shows no emotion other than a sense of sadness and gloom. He sits in the dark for hours. He has called his office several days to report he is taking a sick day. He does none of the things he once did that gave him a sense of joy and accomplishment. He shows no interest in making love with her. He has disappeared for hours in his car and will not say where he has been. Sarah wonders if she has done something to upset him and is desperate to get him to talk with her so she can discover what is happening.

Perhaps this scenario is familiar to you or someone you know. How can we respond to such a crisis? How can we help the one who is depressed?

First, understand the difference between someone who is sad or disheartened and someone who is truly depressed. Sadness or a "blue mood" are experienced by most of us. Depression is much more debilitating and long-lasting. There are at least three levels of depression. One can be called *major depression*, which "is manifested by a combination of symptoms that interfere with the ability to work, sleep, eat, and enjoy once pleasurable activities." Another, called *dysthymia*, is less severe but keeps one "from functioning at 'full steam' or from feeling good." The third level is called *manic-depressive*, or bipolar depression. This "involves cycles of depression and elation or mania."[\[22\]](#)

Second, if you believe someone is struggling continually with depression, encourage him or her to seek help. Suggest that your friend see a trusted pastor, counselor, or physician. The earlier you can suggest this, the better.

Third, at the first sign of depression, encourage conversation and then listen carefully. The deeper a person sinks into a depressed state, the more difficult it is to talk with anyone, even those she loves most. Make yourself available and gently pursue communication as often as you can. But leave time for

silence when you are with her.

Fourth, give emotional support that indicates you are taking the person seriously. "Do not accuse the depressed person of faking illness or of laziness, or expect him or her 'to snap out of it'." [\[23\]](#)

Fifth, be an encourager. Affirm the one who is depressed with statements of truth about his character and abilities, as well as your love for him.

Sixth, if he will let you, pray for him in his presence.

Seventh, if you hear remarks about suicide, take them seriously and seek advice from an expert.

Eighth, act as a "mental mirror." She probably isn't thinking reasonably and is in need of gentle reminders of a clearer image of the world and herself.

Ninth, don't chastise him if he expresses anger, even anger at God. Listen carefully to discover why he is angry and help him begin to think how he can best express that anger.

Tenth, on a larger scale, do what you can to develop an atmosphere in your church that allows one who is depressed to find trust, truth, and compassion.

These ten suggestions, as helpful as they can be, do not constitute the ultimate response to the depressed. We need to remember that ultimate healing rests in the hands of our loving God, who makes all things new.

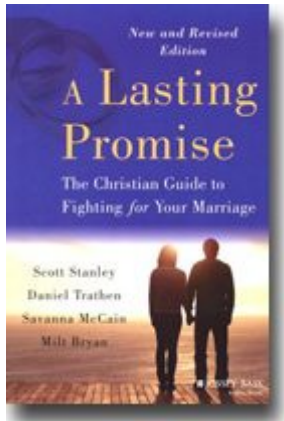
## Notes

1. Clark E. Barshinger, Lojan E. LaRowe, and Andres Tapia, "The Gospel According to Prozac," *Christianity Today* (14 August, 1995), 35.
2. Siang-Yang Tan, "The ABCs of Depression: A Review of the Basics," *Christian Counseling Today* (Fall 1995), 10.

3. *The Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 1967.
4. "Fighting the Stigma," *Newsweek* (20 May 1996), 22-23.
5. F. Duane Lindsey, *The Servant Songs* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 116.
6. *The New Dictionary of Thoughts*, 1936 ed., s.v. "Melancholy."
7. Vera Phillips and Edwin Roberstson, *J.B. Phillips: The Wounded Healer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 110.
8. John White, *The Masks of Melancholy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982), 77-82.
9. *Ibid.*, 18.
10. *The New Dictionary of Thoughts*, s.v. "Despair."
11. White, 25.
12. *Ibid.*, 103-125.
13. Leslie Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature* (New York: Oxford, 1987), 6.
14. White, 53.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 41.
17. *Ibid.*, 45.
18. *Ibid.*, 47.
19. *Ibid.*, 49.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, 220.
22. National Institute of Mental Health, "Depression: What you need to know" (Indianapolis: Eli Lilly, n.d.), 1-3.
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# Why Marriages Fail

Why do marriages fail? While the answers to that question are many, there is a growing body of empirical research to suggest there are four negative risk factors that create barriers to oneness in marriage and increase a couple's chances for marital failure.



I am going to look at these risk factors and see how they can be corrosive elements to oneness in marriage. Most of the material I will cover comes from PREP, which stands for the "Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program" developed at the University of Denver. The material was originally published in a book entitled *Fighting for Your Marriage*, and has been featured on numerous TV newsmagazine programs like "20/20." There is a Christian version of this material found in a book written by Scott Stanley entitled *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*. Perhaps you have heard marriage speakers like Gary Smalley or Dave and Claudia Arp recommend this book (which should be available in your local Christian bookstore and is also available online at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)).

The significance of this research is two-fold. First, it provides a strong body of university research on what makes marriages fail. Other Christian books, though very helpful, are often based upon the opinions and spiritual insights of the authors. The material we will be talking about in this article is based on clinical studies which validate biblical principles others have discussed.

Second, the research provides an extremely accurate predictor of subsequent behavior and marital failure. In one of the key studies, researchers followed a sample of 135 couples for twelve years, starting before they were married. The

researchers found that using only data from before the couple married, they were able to differentiate those couples who do well from those who do not, with up to 91% accuracy. In other words, the seeds of distress and possible divorce were already sown before the couples went to the altar.

Now please do not be discouraged by those numbers. At the outset it seems to be telling us that certain marriages are doomed to failure, and there is nothing a couple can do. But we need to reconsider that conclusion. This research, while showing us marriages which might fall apart, does not suggest that there is nothing we can do about it. This research simply shows us what behaviors can be changed and warns us what will probably happen if we are unwilling or unable to change. As the book of James reminds us, it is not enough to just believe something, we must act upon it (James 1:25, 2:15-18, 3:13).

Since knowing precedes acting, it is necessary to discuss these four negative risk factors that can be barriers to oneness, for oneness is God's design for marriage. Genesis 2:24 says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." When Jesus was confronted by the scribes and Pharisees about the issue of divorce, He brought them back to this foundational truth and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:5-6).

## **Escalation**

According to the research done over the last two decades, negative patterns can destroy a relationship. Couples who want to save their marriage need to focus on changing these negative behavior patterns. There are four such patterns I will discuss here, the first of which is escalation.

According to the researchers, “escalation occurs when partners respond back and forth negatively to each other, continually upping the ante so the conversation gets more and more hostile.”<sup>{1}</sup> 1 Peter 3:9 says, “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.” But this is exactly what happens with escalation. Each negative comment increases the level of anger and frustration, and soon a small disagreement blows up into a major fight.

Research shows that couples who have a good marriage are less prone to escalation. And if the argument starts to escalate, they are able to stop the negative process before it erupts into a full-blown fight. Marriages that will have problems, and even fail, find that arguments escalate so that such damaging things are said that they may even threaten the lifeblood of the marriage.

Escalation can develop in two different ways. The first is a major shouting fight that may erupt over a conflict as small as putting the cap back on the toothpaste. As the battle heats up the partners get more and more angry, saying mean things about each other. Frequently there are threats to end the relationship. Over time those angry words damage oneness, and angry threats to leave begin to seem like prophecy. Once negative comments are made, they are hard to take back and drive a knife into the partner’s heart. Proverbs 12:18 says, “Reckless words pierce like a sword.”

These reckless words can do great damage to a marriage because when an argument escalates, every comment and vulnerability becomes fair game. Concerns, failings, and past mistakes can now be used by the attacking partner. Oneness and intimacy can be shattered quickly by a few reckless words.

You may be thinking, “we don’t fight like cats and dogs.” And while that may be true, your marriage may still have this risk factor. Damaging escalation is not always dramatic. Voices do not have to be raised for couples to get into a cycle of

returning negative for negative. Conflict over paying the rent, taking out the garbage, running errands that result in muttering to oneself, rolling your eyes, or throwing up your hands can also be examples of escalation.

Couples who escalate arguments must control their emotions and control their tongues. James writes, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" (James 1:26). Couples who want a strong marriage must learn to counteract the tendency to escalate as a couple. The key to a strong and stable marriage is learning to control your emotions and learning how to keep a rein on your tongue.

## **Invalidation**

Having covered escalation, I will now turn to the second of the four negative risk factors to oneness. This risk factor is called invalidation. "Invalidation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other."[\[2\]](#)

Invalidation can take many forms. Sometimes it can be caustic, in which one partner (or both) attacks the other person verbally. You can hear, and even feel, the contempt one partner has for another.

Sarcastic phrases like "Well, I'm sorry I'm not perfect like you" or "I forgot how lucky I am to be married to you" can cut like a knife. These are attacks on the person's character and personality that easily destroy a marriage. Research has found that invalidation is one of the best predictors of future problems and divorce.

Jesus taught that attacks on the character of another person are sinful and harmful. "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the

Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matt. 5:22). Calling a person worthless or empty-headed (which is what the Aramaic term *raca* means) is not what a Christian should do.

Invalidation can also be much more subtle. It may involve an argument where contempt for the other partner is not so obvious. One partner may merely be putting the other partner down for his or her feelings. The message conveyed is that your feelings do not matter. A husband may put his wife down because she is more emotional or because she is more easily hurt by comments. A husband may invalidate a wife's fears about the children's safety. A wife may invalidate a husband's desire to succeed in the company, saying that it really doesn't matter if he becomes district manager. Ultimately the partner receiving these comments begins to share less and less so that the intimate level of sharing evaporates. When this happens, oneness is lost.

Sometimes invalidation may be nothing more than trite cliches like "It's not so bad" or "Just trust in the Lord." While the sayings may be true, they invalidate the pain or concern of the other partner. They make the other partner feel like their fears or frustration are inappropriate. This kind of invalidation is what Solomon called "singing songs to a heavy heart" (Prov. 25:20). When one partner is hurting, the other partner should find words of encouragement that do not invalidate his or her pain or concerns.

The antidote to invalidation is validation. Couples must work at validating and accepting the feelings of their spouse. That does not mean you have to agree with your spouse on the issue at hand, but it does mean that you listen to and respect the other person's perspective. Providing care, concern, and comfort will build intimacy. Invalidating fears and feelings will build barriers in a marriage. Discipline yourself to encourage your spouse without invalidating his or her feelings.

## Negative Interpretations

So far we have looked at the negative risk factors of escalation and invalidation. The third risk factor is negative interpretations. "Negative interpretations occur when one partner consistently believes that the motives of the other are more negative than is really the case."<sup>{3}</sup>

Such behavior can be a very destructive pattern in a relationship, and quickly erode intimacy and oneness in a marriage. A wife may believe that her husband does not like her parents. As a result, she may attack him anytime he is not overly enthusiastic about visiting them. He may be concerned with the financial cost of going home for Christmas or about whether he has enough vacation time. She, in turn, considers his behavior as disliking her parents.

When a relationship becomes more distressed, the negative interpretations mount and help create an environment of hopelessness. The attacked partner gives up trying to make himself or herself clear and becomes demoralized.

Another kind of negative interpretation is mind reading. "Mind reading occurs when you assume you know what your partner is thinking or why he or she did something." Nearly everyone is guilty of mind reading at some time or other. And when you mind read positively, it does not tend to do much harm. But when you mind read on the negative side, it can spell trouble for a marriage.

Paul warned against attempting to judge the thoughts and motives of others (1 Cor. 4:5). And Jesus asked, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (Luke 6:41).

Negative interpretations are hard to detect and counteract. Research shows that in distressed marriages there is a tendency for partners to discount the positive things they

see, attributing them to causes such as chance rather than to positive characteristics of the partner. That is why negative interpretations do not change easily.

The key to battling negative interpretations is to reconsider what you think about your partner's motives. Perhaps your partner is more positive than you think. This is not some unrealistic "positive thinking" program, but a realistic assessment of negative assumptions you may be bringing to the marriage.

Did your spouse really forget to do what you asked? Was it intentional or accidental? Does he or she try to annoy you or are you being more critical than is warranted? Most of the time, people think they are doing the best they can. It hurts to be accused of something you never intended to be hurtful. For couples to have a good marriage this pattern of negative interpretation must be eliminated.

Often this is easier said than done. First, you have to ask yourself if your thinking might be overly negative. Do you give your spouse the benefit of the doubt? Second, you have to push yourself to look for evidence that is contrary to your negative interpretation. Often it is easier to see his or her speck than your own plank. Give your mate the benefit of the doubt rather than let inaccurate interpretations sabotage your marriage.

## **Withdrawal and Avoidance**

Escalation, invalidation, and negative interpretations are three of the four negative risk factors identified by researchers at the University of Denver. The last of these has two descriptors: withdrawal and avoidance. These are two different manifestations of the problem wherein a partner is unwilling to get in or stay in a discussion that is too threatening.

“Withdrawal can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as ‘turning off’ or ‘shutting down’ during an argument. The withdrawer often tends to get quiet during an argument, look away, or agree quickly to a partner’s suggestion just to end the conversation, with no real intention of following through.”[\[4\]](#)

“Avoidance reflects the same reluctance to get into certain discussions, with more emphasis on the attempt to not let the conversation happen in the first place. A person prone to avoidance would prefer that the topic not come up and, if it does, may manifest the signs of withdrawal just described.”[\[5\]](#)

In a typical marriage, one partner is the pursuer and the other is the withdrawer. Studies show that it is usually the man who wants to avoid these discussions and is more likely in the withdrawing role. However, sometimes the roles reverse. But, for the sake of this discussion, we will assume that the husband is the one who withdraws.

Why does he withdraw? Because he does not feel emotionally safe to stay in the argument. Sometimes he may even be afraid that if he stays in the discussion or argument that he might turn violent, so he retreats.

When the husband withdraws, the wife feels shut out and believes that he does not care about the marriage. In other words, lack of talking equals lack of caring. But that is often a negative interpretation about the withdrawer.

He, on the other hand, may believe that his wife gets upset too much of the time, nagging and picking fights. This is also a negative interpretation because most pursuers really want to stay connected and resolve the issue he does not want to talk about.

Couples who want to have a good marriage must learn to stay engaged. Paul said, writing to the church in Ephesus, “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak

truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Eph. 4:25-27).

Although the immediate context in this passage is anger, the broader principle is the importance of not allowing avoidance to become a corrosive pattern in your marriage. Couples should build oneness and intimacy by speaking openly and honestly about important issues in their marriage.

## Conclusion

Each of these four risk factors (escalation, invalidation, negative interpretations, and withdrawal and avoidance) can build barriers in a marriage leading ultimately to loneliness and isolation. The research shows that couples that want a good marriage need to eliminate these risk factors from their marriage, or else the negative factors will overwhelm the positive aspects of the marriage. It is never too late to put your marriage back on track.

For further study on this topic, I would once again recommend that you purchase the book *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*. This book is widely available and is a good source for help in establishing and maintaining the oneness that God desires for every marriage.

## Notes

1. Scott Stanley, et al. *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1998), p. 29.
2. Stanley, p. 32.
3. Stanley, p. 35-36.
4. Stanley, p. 40.
5. Stanley, p. 40-41.