

Luke, I Am Not Your Father

One of the greatest movie lines in history is in *Star Wars*, when the evil Darth Vader reveals the awful truth to our hero Luke Skywalker: “Luke, I am your father.” (Actually, this is a misquote, but it’s become part of our cultural lexicon anyway. Check out this [YouTube video](#) of a four-year-old’s priceless reaction to seeing this scene in *Star Wars* for the first time.)



Luke is understandably traumatized by the revelation that the enemy is actually his daddy.

He’s in good company. Millions—probably billions—of people in human history have sustained “father wounds” because their dads were punitive, abusive, evil, distant, judgmental, absent, unsafe, or just disengaged. We live in a fallen world where our relationships are broken, and where hurt people, hurt people. A father’s role is incredibly powerful, both for good and for evil, and every father makes an indelible impression on his children whether he intends to or not.

Children grow up receiving many messages about what a father is like by watching their dads—and boy, do they watch their dads. The only way a boy can learn how to be a man is by watching and copying men, and a father is the closest man to a child. The way a girl learns the value of being female is by watching how her father treats her mother and herself. Children can grow up learning that a father is loving and kind, disciplining from a teaching heart that wants them to

grow up to be good adults, a man of integrity and honesty. Many of us were blessed to grow up with just such a dad, and with the “heart template” of a father like that, we can become a parent very much like our wonderful dads—and the generational blessings of a good example are handed down through the years.

But children can also grow up learning that a father is a mean bully whose anger is to be feared and avoided. They can learn that a father’s temperament is volatile; they never know if he will embrace them warmly or freeze them out with contempt or indifference. They can learn that a father’s word cannot be trusted, and that he presents himself with one face in the world and the church, but quite another at home. They can learn that a father is non-communicative and authoritarian, a deadly combination. Some children grow up learning that a father is nothing more than a sperm donor who is there to conceive them but disappears forever.

This is bad enough, but it gets worse.

God puts children in families where they learn about Him from the way their parents model parenthood. Our concept of “father” is whatever our own dads looked and acted like. Then, when we discover that God reveals Himself as Father in His Word, we paint the face of our heavenly Father with a brush dipped into the bucket of whatever our own fathers were like.

One of my friends shared with me several hurtful stories of the way her dad related to her in judgment throughout her entire life—including the breathtaking condemnation, “If you disappoint *me* this much, how much more must you disappoint God??” She really struggled with trusting Him. One day I told her, “Sweetie, you don’t know God. He is not a heavenly version of your earthly father. He is who He is. Let’s pray that you will see Him as He really is.” Later, she told me that being told she didn’t know God was the turning point in her relationship with Him, and she started reading the

scriptures with an eagerness to find out who He actually is. She started living out Romans 12:2—"be transformed by the renewing of your mind"—and gratefully allowed the Holy Spirit to change the earthly-father filter through which she understood God the Father to be.

One of the kindest things God can tell us is, "Child, I am not your earthly father. I am your heavenly Father. Let Me transform the way you see me through the power of My word." One of the best places to marinate and meditate is Luke 15. Jesus told all three stories in that chapter to reveal to us the heart of His Father. We are most familiar with the third story, the parable commonly called "The Prodigal Son." But it's really about the amazing, grace-filled Father. That story is the best and most accurate filter in the whole Bible for testing our conception of God.

If we see God as vindictive and full of wrath, anxious to blast us with His angry thunderbolts: how does the Father in Luke 15 compare? Where is the judgmental condemnation in that story? It's not there!

If we see God as distant, unapproachable and uncommunicative, what do we do with the picture of the Father out looking every day for His lost child to return, running to meet him when he finally does?

If we see God as stingy and mean-spirited about His wealth, how does Jesus' picture of the Father's generous heart correct our perception?

If Luke Skywalker were real and looking to the Lord, I think he might hear, "Luke, I am NOT your father. I am your Father. Come here and let Me enfold you in My good, loving and safe embrace."

This blog post originally appeared at

Focus on What's Fixed

My husband and I recently took an Alaskan cruise. As we settled ourselves for sailaway in front of large windows on one of the highest decks, I heard a little girl ask, "Did we start moving yet? How will we know when we're moving?" I don't know what her mother said, but I do know the answer: you fix your gaze on what *isn't* moving.

I was looking at the building in this picture I took; when the ship starting pushing away from the pier, I knew we were moving because of our view through the window in relation to the stationary building.



And I thought, "Little one, the answer to your question is wisdom for life as well. Stay focused on what is unmovable, unchangeable, what is true for all times and all people in all places. Then you will be able to respond wisely to what moves and changes in your life and in the world."

This is true in both the small things and the world-shaking immense ones. Ray and I have been away from home for two and a half weeks, on an itinerary that has meant a lot of shifting and changing locations, unpacking suitcases one week and trying to live out of them the next. We remind ourselves that the inconvenience is temporary because, Lord willing, we'll be home soon. That is a small, small thing made easier by remaining aware that "this too shall pass," that the comforting security of home and routine is right around the

corner. But on the other end of the scale there are also horrible, horrible things happening in our world, particularly the explosion of Islamic terrorism in Iraq, persecuting Christians who are losing everything up to and including their earthly lives. West Africa is seriously shaken by an Ebola outbreak that is causing instability in everything. If that's not enough examples for you, Lael Arrington recently blogged here about "[Five Ways to Dispel Dread.](#)"

It can feel like the world is wobbling on its axis. Even our own little worlds. It is crucial to keep our eyes on the One who says, "I the Lord do not change" (Malachi 3:6), on the One who promises, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). We need to stay focused on the unchanging Word of God, in which He reveals that He knows how the future will unfold, and has everything under control—even the end-times horrors that appear to be right around the corner.

Later on our cruise, as we were sailing from one port to another, I knew we were moving—apart from feeling it—because I could see the churned-up wake next to the ship. But in order to tell how much we were rolling from side to side, I focused on the horizon which appeared to rise and fall. But since I knew it was unmovable, that meant the rising and falling was happening on the ship. I sat looking out the window, gazing at the horizon that reminded me of God's unchangeableness. A good and loving God is always, always in control. I am so glad.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/focus-on-whats-fixed/ on August 12, 2014.

Christian Worldview Links

Here are some other sites that we suggest are worth checking out.

[Worldview Academy](#)

Worldview Academy is a non-denominational ministry committed to training students and parents to think and live in accord with the Christian worldview. They pursue this mission via three primary programs: WVA Leadership Camps, week-long camps that train and equip students 13 and older; "Mere Christianity" Worldview Weekends, providing the same basic education for adults and teens at host churches nation-wide; and educational resources.

[Worldview Matters](#)

Which Way Does Your Worldview Compass Point? Like a compass pointing north, a worldview provides the bearings a person needs for determining which direction to take when any issue is faced. The only problem is, not every worldview points north. "Think Again!" is a multi-media, interactive workshop that clarifies the latitude and longitude lines of a biblically based worldview.

[Christian Information Ministries](#)

Bill Crouse and Russ Wise are former Probe staff members who have written prodigiously on a number of current issues from a Christian perspective. Bill also offers the Rapid Response Report, an analysis of important issues in our culture today that you can read online or receive by e-mail: www.rapidresponsereport.com

[Leadership University](#)

LU has an awesome amount of information on a wide variety of topics of interest to high school and college students. This is a terrific resource for those seeking a Christian perspective.

Stand to Reason

Greg Koukl's ministry is building Christian thinkers for the public defense of the faith. This site has articles on abortion, apologetics, ethics, evolution, homosexuality, philosophy, life, science, social issues, and theology.

Spiritual Counterfeits Project

For years, SCP has been providing in-depth Christian perspective on the enemy's deceptions and schemes in arenas ranging from near-death experiences to virtual reality to the latest New Age trends.

Access Research Network

Visit this site for a responsible, Christian perspective on science, technology and society. The folks at ARN have been friends of Probe for a long time.

Vital Signs Ministries

Vital Signs Ministries is a Christ-centered pro-life agency, created to help tell the truth about abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, chastity and other life issues. They are a group of Christians who genuinely desire to obey God's commands to seek justice for those threatened by the death ethic which now rampages through our culture.

The Things That Matter Most (and I-Tunes)

Airing on major talk radio stations in Houston and Dallas,

this program explores what we believe and why we believe it with guests as diverse as theologian R.C. Sproul and atheist Sam Harris. Each week hosts (longtime worldview friend of Probe) Lael Arrington and Rick Davis explore scholarly evidence and fascinating personal stories about God and eternity, reason and faith, purpose and meaning with both skeptics and true believers. Select Listen to shows to download archived programs on Christianity:

The Case for the Real Jesus, Lee Strobel;

Islam: Inside the Hajj, Dr. Hesham Hassaballa;

Science and God: The Human Genome Project, Director, Dr. Francis Collins,

How Science Shows that God Does Not Exist, Dr. Victor Stenger (with Dr. Hugh Ross);

Skeptics: The Gospel of Judas, Dr. Bart Ehrman (with Dr. Darrel Bock),

Time mag humor writer, Joel Stein;

Morality: PostSecrets, Frank Warren,

War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, Chris Hedges;

Religions: Kabbalah, Yehuda Berg,

Escaping Scientology, Karen Pressley;

Origins: What Evolution Can and Can't Do, Dr. Michael Behe;

Health: Why Good Things Happen to Good People, Dr. Stephen Post;

Spiritual Memoirs: Finding God Beyond Harvard, Kelly Monroe Kullberg,

Letting Go of God, Saturday Night Live comedienne Julia Sweeney;

Afterlife: 90 Minutes in Heaven, Don Piper,

Near Death Experiences, Dr. Gary Habermas

[Bible Study Tools](#)

BibleStudyTools.com is the largest free online Bible website for verse search and in-depth studies. You can create personalized Bible Studies with the ability to highlight Scripture, save notes in the margin and search and compare 31

versions side by side on a split-panel screen, all for free. Includes: Over 30 different Bible translations; Bible translations in Spanish, French, German, Italian and Dutch; Apocrypha books in different versions; Bible Commentaries including Matthew Henry, Scofield and Wesley; Concordances from Nave, Strong, Torrey and others; Popular dictionaries of the Bible including Baker's Evangelical, Easton's, and Smith's; Biblical Encyclopedias; Church history writings like Fox's Book of Martyrs and those of Flavius Josephus; Greek and Hebrew Lexicons; Bible Maps and guides for bible study.

Kerby Anderson Recommends . . .

[Abortion Facts](http://www.abortionfacts.com) [http://www.abortionfacts.com]

[Wallbuilders](http://www.wallbuilders.com) [http://www.wallbuilders.com]

[Town Hall](http://www.townhall.com/) [http://www.townhall.com/]

[Heritage Foundation](http://www.heritage.org/) [http://www.heritage.org/]

[National Review](http://www.townhall.com/) [http://www.townhall.com/]

[Freedom Works](http://www.freedomworks.org/) [http://www.freedomworks.org/]

[Media Research Center](http://www.mrc.org/) [http://www.mrc.org/]

[One News Now](http://www.onenewsnow.com/) [http://www.onenewsnow.com/]

[Family Research Council](http://www.frc.org/) [http://www.frc.org/]

[American Family Association](http://www.afa.net/) [http://www.afa.net/]

[National Right to Life](http://www.nrlc.org/) [http://www.nrlc.org/]

[Christian Coalition](http://www.cc.org/) [http://www.cc.org/]

[Concerned Women for America](http://www.cwfa.org/) [http://www.cwfa.org/]

[National Religious Broadcasters](http://nrb.org/) [http://nrb.org/]

[Moody Bible Institute](http://www.moody.edu) [http://www.moody.edu]

[Christian Broadcasting Network](http://www.the700club.org/) [http://www.the700club.org/]

[Leadership University](http://www.leaderu.com/) [http://www.leaderu.com/]

[World Magazine](http://www.worldmag.com) [http://www.worldmag.com]

[Traditional Values Coalition](http://www.traditionalvalues.org)

[http://www.traditionalvalues.org]

[Eagle Forum](http://www.eagleforum.org) [http://www.eagleforum.org]

Favorites of Other Probe Staff...

[The Biblical Studies Foundation](#)

This is a treasure trove of biblical commentaries, message/sermon illustrations, well-written essays and even the work-in-progress "NET Bible." Teachers and pastors will find this a tremendous resource for their preparation.

[Christianity and Homosexuality Home Page](#)

With links to articles by both Exodus International and Homosexuals Anonymous (Christian organizations ministering to those seeking help for their homosexuality), this page is an excellent resource for those seeking to understand this issue that holds suffering people in its grip.

[The Medical Institute for Sexual Health](#)

The Medical Institute is a nonprofit medical organization founded in 1992 by gynecologist Joe S. McIlhaney, Jr., M.D., designed to confront the world epidemics of nonmarital pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. The only 100 percent effective way to avoid nonmarital pregnancy and STD infection is to avoid sexual activity outside a mutually faithful lifelong relationship – marriage. The Medical Institute believes there is a new sexual revolution underway – one based on science, built on character and bridged through education.

[Bible Prayer Fellowship](#)

This organization exists to "share how you can know God intimately and enjoy the abundant life He gives to those who seek Him. We want you to be one of our prayer partners. Together let's learn to pray prayers that really transform individuals, families, small groups and churches."

[C.S. Lewis Society of California](#)

Good resources for fans of Christian worldview master C.S. Lewis.

[Forum of Christian Leaders](#)

The Forum of Christian Leaders online (FOCL) is a web site which presents audio and video recordings of talks by Christian leaders from Europe and America. Recordings come from the annual European Leadership Forum which Rick Wade attended several years, and cover a wide range of topics in such areas as apologetics, discipleship, theology, economics and business, counseling and psychology, education, leadership, and culture and art. The Forum is a place for Christians in leadership positions to interact and support each other, so presenters speak from their own experience in ministry. Presentation formats include answers to specific questions, short talks, workshops, webinars, and longer courses. This is a rich resource!

If God is So Good, Why Does He Let Me Hurt?

This is probably the biggest question, and the biggest obstacle to trusting God, in Christianity. It's a legitimate question, and it deserves a thoughtful answer that honors the amount of pain attached to it. Disclosure: I am writing this while beset by the most physical pain I've experienced since post-polio syndrome started attacking my body with the "unholy trinity" of pain, weakness and fatigue. It hurts to stand, it

hurts to walk. Every single step.

Why does God allow it? And my pain is *nothing* compared to the horrific suffering of millions around the world. Doesn't He care? Why doesn't He stop it—surely He can. He could stop it all with a single word. So why does He let innocent people—especially children, for heaven's sake—suffer?

We need to put evil and suffering into perspective, and that means the Really Big Picture. Starting before the beginning of time. When all there was, was God: Father, Son and Spirit, engaged in a three-Personed “holy hug” that had no beginning and has no end. A continual celebration of love, adoration, respect, and delight in each other. At some point Father God decided to create mankind and draw us into His circle of love, adopting us as sons (Eph. 1:4-5) and creating a Bride for His eternal Son (Rev. 19:7), a fit companion who would reign with the Lamb (Rev. 22:5).

But God knew that all of human history would unfold between the bookends of the creation of mankind and the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. The God of light and life, of love and truth, knew that all those things are found only in Him; He knew that to reject Him meant choosing darkness and death, isolation and deception. He knew that Adam would rebel, that His perfect creation would crash and burn in the Fall, and that everything would be infected and corrupted by sin. He knew that every human being would be born with a compulsion to reject Him, to live disconnected from Him, independent from Him—something like spiritual HIV+, insuring a death sentence. And sure enough, the mortality rate is still 100%.

God knew all this, and He created us anyway. Because He knew the end result was worth it.

Because God is love, He created people to love, and He created people to love Him back. In order for us to choose to return His love, we needed to be free to choose NOT to love Him. God

made us with the very real option to say no to Him, so that our yes would mean something. The alternative would be the equivalent to making a phone say, "Good morning, I love you." The words might be there but there is no heart and no choice behind them—they are nothing more than the result of a programming code. God wanted real and actual love, and that meant that some people He made and dearly loved, could and would say no.

When people say no to God, they not only cut themselves off from relationship with Him, they open the door to all kinds of evil. Some of it comes from sinful human hearts; some of it comes from the demonic realm, angels who also said no to God and became devils. Evil was unleashed by Adam when he disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3) and it has been causing havoc, pain and suffering ever since. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that this world plagued by pain and disease, deliberate meanness and selfishness, is not God's original perfect creation. If it were, God would indeed be a horrible monster. He knew Adam would open the door to all kinds of evil and suffering, and He allowed Adam to do it anyway. Because He knew the end result was worth it.

Why does God let people suffer?

God uses suffering to cleanse us, to mature us, to burn up shallowness. (Please see my article [The Value of Suffering](#).) [He uses pain](#) as His instrument to shape us into the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-29). God has no magic wand that instantly transforms us from something broken and dirty (and we are far more broken and dirty than we have any idea) into something whole and beautiful. There is no divine "Bibbity-Bobbity-Boo."

Instead, the Son left heaven, wrapped Himself in human flesh, and came to earth where He lived a perfect, sinless life. Every day of His earthly life, He suffered as a human, limiting Himself to a body that would get tired, hungry, thirsty and dirty. What the first Adam messed up, Jesus the

Second Adam corrected. Where Adam disobeyed the Father, Jesus learned obedience through suffering (Heb. 5:8). Jesus suffered throughout His incarnation simply because of His limitations as a human, then suffered an unimaginably horrible death through crucifixion, made even worse because He absorbed all the sin of every human being who had ever lived, was living on the earth at that time, and would ever exist in the future. He took our sin into Himself, actually becoming our sin (2 Cor. 5:21), so that when He died, our sin died with Him. But the Father raised Him from the dead, and He is alive at His Father's right hand right now in heaven.

This means that God knows what it means to suffer. There is no pain, no suffering we can endure, that God Himself did not experience even more during Jesus' time on earth. This same suffering God promised, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5). The Father knew He would send the Son to suffer, and the Son knew that's what He would leave heaven for.

He did it anyway. Because He knew the end result was worth it.

God allows pain and suffering and evil because He has a plan, and He's working His plan. The end result is that He is redeeming and restoring all the evil, pain and suffering of this sin-sick world. He will set all things right in the end. The last chapter of the Bible makes it clear that there is a happy ending to what is NOT a fairy tale. What started out as a Three-Personed holy hug of the Father, Son and Spirit loving each other while still remaining one God, will be a hugely enlarged circle of love that includes millions, possibly billions of people God made in His image, marked "Mine," and drew into the divine circle to love and be loved forever.

At that point I believe we will agree, as we look back on evil, pain and suffering on earth, that it was so, so worth it.

This blog post originally appeared at [If God Is So Good, Why Does He Let Me Hurt?](#) on July 15, 2014

“Is Soul Sleep Biblical?”

I am writing to seek clarification on the rather thorny issue of life after death. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 Paul outlines how the process of judgment will take place. He says, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a loud cry of summons, with the shout of an archangel, and with the blast of the trumpet of God. And those who have departed this life in Christ will rise first.” Isn’t this a substantive indication of “soul sleep”? If what Paul asserts is anything to go by it means that after death the soul remains in somewhat a “holding cell” until the day of judgment regardless of the person’s beliefs and tenets prior to death. An appendage would be 1 Samuel 28:1-14; I believe this passage also corroborates the “holding cell” school of thought.

Thanks for your letter. This is a very important issue. I am personally persuaded that the doctrine of “soul sleep” is incorrect. When the Bible speaks of death in terms of “sleep,” it is speaking this way because the person’s body looks as if it were asleep. In other words, this way of speaking has to do with the body, and not the soul.

This is evident, I think, when one considers a passage like Luke 16:19-31. Both the rich man and Lazarus die, but their souls are very far from being “asleep” (in the sense of unconscious). The men in this story, although physically dead, are pictured as consciously awake and aware of their surroundings. Their bodies have died, but their souls are very much conscious in the afterlife.

This is also evident in Revelation 6:9-11. And it is further supported by the teaching (concerning believers) that when we die, we go immediately to be with the Lord. Here, remember what Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Or consider Paul's statements in passages like 2 Cor. 5:1-10 or Philippians 1:23. All of these passages indicate, I think, that believers are conscious and with the Lord in paradise between death and resurrection. Unbelievers, likewise, are also conscious (though they are in torment and separated from the Lord).

Hence, the Bible seems to teach that we continue to experience some form of personal, conscious existence between death and resurrection.

I hope that these passages from Scripture will help to clear up this issue for you.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

Posted July 2014

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"Your Answer About OT Prophecies of Jesus' Resurrection Are Troubling"

You responded to a question written by someone titled, ["Where are the OT Prophecies of Jesus' Resurrection?"](#) Your answer is troubling. In Acts 13:32 God the Holy Spirit through Luke makes it expressly clear that He did prophesy in the OT

regarding Christ's resurrection. You answered that there are no prophecies in the OT about Jesus' resurrection. Summed up: Your answer is in contradiction to Acts 13:32. Resolution?

I do (in fact) believe that there are OT predictions concerning the resurrection of Christ. The issue I was wrestling with in my response, however, is whether any of these predictions are "explicit" or "specific." I state this quite clearly in my original letter:

"I do not think there are any specific predictions of Jesus' resurrection in the OT."

And although I could always be wrong, it doesn't seem to me that the predictions are of this sort. It is only after His resurrection that we can clearly see that these passages were intended to refer to the resurrection of Christ. Prior to this, however, it does not seem to me that it was clear from the OT that the Messiah would be raised from the dead. This is certainly not something that the Jews of Jesus' day (including Jesus' own disciples) were expecting. This is quite clear, I think, if you look at those passages in which Jesus predicts His resurrection to His own disciples (e.g. Mark 8:31-32; 9:30-32; etc.). Indeed, the apostle John tells us quite explicitly that he did not believe until he saw some evidence of Jesus' resurrection. And (speaking for himself and the other disciples) he specifically tells us why:

"For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9).

In other words, _____, in spite of all the OT prophetic evidence AND Jesus' repeated predictions that He would rise from the dead after being crucified, the disciples did not understand any of it. It was still not clear to them. They were not expecting the death and resurrection of their Messiah and they were initially quite surprised by it all.

So while I agree that there are OT predictions of the

resurrection of Christ, I just don't see that these predictions are explicit in the sense of telling us directly, "The Messiah will be raised from the dead," etc. Of course, if you can point one out to me that is explicit in this sense, I would be very grateful.

So it seems to me that the resolution to your difficulty, _____, is to read your sources a bit more carefully in the future.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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Transgender Children

How should we think about the growing number of children being told they are transgender? A recent YouTube video from parents of a six-year-old transgender child named Ryland went viral, with well over six million views in just a couple of weeks. A beautiful little girl announced she was a boy, *insisted* she was a boy. Her parents' research apparently was limited to LGBT (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender) sources, and they decided to raise her as a boy, cut her hair like a boy, dress her like a boy, and use male pronouns to feed her illusion that she is a boy. The internet exploded with enthusiastic praise for this family.

How should we think about situations like this from a biblical

perspective?

That's the key: we need to understand that this is really a worldview issue. Perspective is crucial. Where you start makes all the difference. If you leave God out of it, starting with the person trying to make sense of the feeling that one's body is not aligned with their internal sense of gender, then confusion is inevitable. If people feel free to define themselves as they wish, then sex and gender can be seen as elastic or fluid—and manipulatable. It's the modern-day expression of an Old Testament phenomenon that never worked out well, when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" in the times of the Judges (Judges 17:6).

But if you start with God as creator, with the right to choose a baby's gender, then that makes a huge difference. When baby Ryland's birth was announced with a happy, "It's a girl!"—God was speaking His intention for her identity and her life.

Sometimes children try on alternate identities—girls saying they are boys, boys saying they are horses. Parents are responsible for modeling logic and wisdom (not to mention life experience) in their response to this kind of proclamation. When Ryland started screaming "I'm a boy," it was a perfect opportunity to ask some critical thinking (and critically important) questions: "What is a boy?" "Why don't you like being a girl?" Their video says that Ryland "began to show aversion to anything feminine." This, of course, is the story of many girls whom God created as tomboys, who don't like the stereotypical pink-girly-girl attributes our culture labels as feminine. The problem is not an aversion to pink frills; the problem is a too-narrow definition of femininity. [Please see my post [The Gender Spectrum](#).]

If Ryland's parents continue down the path of other parents who enable their children to feed the unrealistic fantasy that they can choose to be anything they want, including the other gender, that will include giving Ryland powerful hormones to suppress puberty, and other powerful hormones to cause her

body to mimic maleness: muscle mass, a stubble, a deeper voice, more body hair. But as one girl who stopped taking testosterone [put it](#), "This is not who you are. You are hiding behind a chemically induced mask." No hormones or surgery can turn Ryland into a male. Nothing will change her XX chromosomes. Most boys grow up to become fathers, but she can never father a child. She is NOT a boy, she will NEVER be a man. It is neither loving nor wise to cooperate with confusion, which will only get worse with age.

When adults tell a child "you are transgender," and the child then parrots that idea, both the parents and the child get something right and something wrong. The something right is an awareness of a heartbreaking brokenness, which is what can happen in a fallen world. The something wrong is the diagnosis of *what* is broken: it's not their body, it's their feelings. Transgender transition and therapy try to change the part that is healthy (one's body) and bring it into alignment with what is broken (one's thinking and feeling).

To return to a biblical perspective: God says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Regardless of what the situation, whenever our thinking and feelings are out of alignment with God's intention, we need to submit our will and our thinking to the transforming power of God. What does that look like? Speaking the truth to oneself, encouraged by other truth-speakers. In the case of those struggling with their gender: "God made me female (or male), and I choose to trust that He is good and He knows what He's doing. I surrender my beliefs and feelings about femaleness (or maleness) to Him. I choose to pursue intimacy with Him over my own sense of self, and allow Him to change me from the inside out."

It's not easy, but it's always the right thing to choose the truth over an illusion. Over a lie.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/transgender_children on June 17, 2014.

“What Does the Bible Say About Tattoos?”

I have a few family members who have recently gotten tattoos. I was wondering if there was any mention in the Bible about this being a good thing to do or a wrong thing to do? I thought that at one time I read something about it being wrong. And if it is wrong how can I address the issue in a decent way to people I love and care for who are not Christians?

Actually, yes the Bible does address the subject of tattoos. Lev. 19:28 says, “Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD.”

If your loved ones are not Christians, they may or may not care that God specifically addressed this issue in the Bible. If they do, knowing God said not to do it might be enough. If not, you might mention that there must be a good reason for God to forbid His people to permanently mark their bodies this way, and it turns out there are several.

1. To quote my brother-in-law, who became enamored of “body art” when he was younger and sports seven large tatoos on his body—which he now despises—“Permanent is a long, long time.” The majority of people who get tattoos regret it later.

2. Tattoos are exceedingly painful and expensive to have removed.

3. Some tattoo inks have metal in them, so if one's health is threatened, an MRI can be complicated (and there can be some discomfort) by a tattoo.

4. On a more spiritual note, God may not want us to permanently mark our bodies because it is disrespectful to the body He fashioned and gave to us to steward. The fact that a tattoo cannot be undone (completely) reflects the sad truth that some decisions are one-way and we box ourselves into a corner. Tattoos make a statement physically, but God intends that the purity and beauty of our LIVES make the statement, rather than "I was young (or drunk, or on drugs) and did this to myself." (Yes, I am biased, I will cheerfully admit. <grin>)

Now, the New Testament doesn't repeat this prohibition, and it's not a moral issue like sexual sin or lying or stealing which are still wrong and forever will be, so I don't think it's a sin anymore. Many people believe this is an area where we have Christian liberty, the freedom to do something that used to be prohibited.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries
August 2001

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Several e-mails arrived shortly after this article was posted, pointing out the fact that this prohibition against tattoos was part of the Levitical code, but Christians do not live under the Old Testament laws. Otherwise, we would be sinning to:

- Shave off beards and sideburns
- Wear crew cuts
- Wear linen/wool blends

- Not take a bath after intercourse
- Circumcise baby boys on any day other than the eighth
- Attend church sooner than 33 days after the birth of a baby

I appreciate being shown the need to explain the fuller picture.

The person who wrote merely asked if the Bible said anything about tattoos, and it does, and I pointed out some good reasons for that prohibition. However, it is also true that we do not live under Old Testament laws, and most of the Levitical prohibitions and requirements no longer apply because we live under a new covenant of grace. (I hasten to add here that the *moral* prohibitions, such as those against any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage, including homosexuality, are still firmly in place.)

Thus, while the Bible did prohibit tattoos in the Old Testament, it is not a sin to get one today. Dumb, maybe, but not sinful. <grin> (That's a joke. Please don't send me e-mails if you have one and like it. You have complete freedom in Christ to do anything He gives permission for you to do.)

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. . .And then this appeared in "Dear Abby," which I thought was well worth sharing:

Dear Abby: You have printed letters about tattoos, so I thought you might get a kick out of my experience. Two summers ago, my sister "Julie" confided that her daughter, "Whitney," had decided to get a tattoo before returning to college. Julie was upset about it, but could not change her daughter's mind because Whitney is on a full scholarship and didn't need anyone's approval. Julie asked if I could talk Whitney out of it, and I racked my brain trying to think of something to say that would sway her. A few weeks later, our families got together to celebrate Julie's 50th birthday. Whitney was there

with her boyfriend. After we all had enjoyed ice cream and cake, I took Whitney and her boyfriend into the living room and popped in a videotape of a party my husband and I had thrown during the disco craze of the 70s. There we were in our leisure suits, gold chains, permed hair, platform shoes and having a great time.

Whitney and her boyfriend were rolling on the floor with laughter. They couldn't believe that "look" was actually the craze at the time. "Yes," I said, "that was the style. But as times changed, styles changed, and what was once 'in' was soon 'out.'"

At that moment, Julie and her husband walked into the living room dressed in retro clothes and wigs. They were followed by Grandma and Grandpa, who had applied fake tattoos to their arms and shoulders. Whitney was stunned to see her conservative grandparents so out of character.

It was then that we reminded Whitney we had been able to buy different clothes and change our hairstyles when the fad was over, but tattoos are forever.

Disco clothes and wigs: \$85

Fake tattoos: \$30

The look on Whitney's face: priceless!

(To date, no tattoos for Whitney.)

Signed,

Creative in Las Vegas

Dear Creative: Your letter: a gem. Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. You made your point with an object lesson that was far more effective than any lecture would have been.

June 2003

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Addendum, September 2014

I'd like to add this YouTube video addressing the question of tattoos from my wise pastor, Todd Wagner of Watermark Community Church in Dallas, Texas:

[See also "What About Body Piercing?"](#)

The Commencement Address I'll Never Get to Give

May 20, 2014

Graduations mean commencement addresses. Most of which are eminently forgettable, containing feel-good charges to go do great stuff and change the world. But in my experience, they're always given by men, who are some kind of celebrity.

I am neither.

But I have a few thoughts on practical life lessons that newly-minted graduates might use.

"Hey graduates, congratulations. You made it to the cap-and-gown stage. Not without a lot of help and prodding and prayers and frustration from your parents though, right? Thank them. There's not a single thing you are or do or have that they didn't have a part in. Thank them again.

"Speaking of thanking, one of the most important habits you can ever form is gratitude. Especially toward God. He is continually blessing you with everything from the ability to draw your next breath, to your ability to remember your name,

to your ability to walk or drive and think and talk and get a job or more education. Thank Him for all those things. Regularly stop and ask yourself, "What would I really miss tomorrow if I didn't give thanks for it today?"—and then thank the Lord for it. A grateful heart is not a complaining heart, or a critical heart, or an entitled heart. Believe me, it will make you a much better person to live with, or work with, or play with, or just be with.

"You've just finished many years of schooling, and you may have been indoctrinated with a bunch of hooey about how wonderful and special you are because of some well-meaning self-esteem curriculum. You may have thrown away dozens of ribbons or trophies you received just for showing up. Those days are over, because that was never real life. Self-esteem and self-confidence are only gained one way, the hard way: working hard to meet a challenge and not give up until you succeed. You earn self-confidence by doing, not by reciting platitudes in a mirror.

"If you haven't read Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, read it. It's a classic of how to understand people and how they like to be treated. The reason it's so true is that the book fleshes out the second great commandment, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'

"For example, when you see a service person, like a waitstaff or toll booth attendant, call him or her by name. One's name is the sweetest sound on earth to each person, and service personnel are often treated as if they were invisible. Using someone's name says, 'You are *not* invisible to me, and I honor you for your service.' Prospective employees and spouses have been known to disqualify themselves because of the way they treated people with disrespect or contempt when out in public.

"Everyone has an invisible tattoo on their forehead that says 'Please encourage me.' Most people have an invisible speech bubble over their heads that says, 'Do I matter? Please show

me I matter.’ Every single person you will ever meet is infinitely valuable as the handcrafted masterpiece of the Creator God, and they deserve to be honored and respected simply because God made them and He loves them.

“Some final pithy words to the wise.

“Listen to your body. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, and it will tell you what it needs.

“Learn to recognize the nudges of the Holy Spirit, and follow them.

“Pray for your future spouse. He or she is out there somewhere. Your prayers WILL make a difference.

“If you wonder if you should be doing something, you probably shouldn’t. If the thought, ‘Should I be doing this?’ even enters your head, it’s an alarm.

“Don’t believe everything you think.

“When you’re on a road trip, never pass up an opportunity to use the restroom. Consider taking some disinfectant and a roll of paper towels with you, and leave it cleaner than you found it.

“And finally, do one good thing every day that no one will see but God. It will build your character and make deposits in your heavenly bank account that you’ll forget about, but He won’t.

“The Lord bless you and keep you. Your real education is about to begin.”

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/the-commencement-address-ill-never-get-to-give/

Boy Scouts: Let's Hear It For Masculinity

Ceremonies make me cry. Any ceremony, no matter how cheesy. But some ceremonies are deeply meaningful and important, which is how I about cried off all my makeup recently at a Boy Scout Court of Honor where the son of my Probe colleague Byron Barlowe received his Eagle Scout rank.

Understanding God's gift of gender is a big deal to me, and I viewed the ceremony through that grid. I saw the glory of healthy, godly masculinity on display, particularly the goodness of men teaching boys to be men.

I saw men serving others through leadership and modeling. The long-term commitment of many volunteer years in this particular troop showed that the leaders understood the value of faithfulness and persistence over time. Each Eagle Scout recipient was featured in a video that included remarks by the scout, each of his parents, and his troop mentor, and the many thank-yous to the men who gave of themselves as leaders pointed to their servant leadership.

Boys who had earned badges and who had advanced in rank were rewarded with a badge, affirmation and applause. (Which included the [left handshake](#), which I now know, thanks to Uncle Google, is a worldwide scouting thing.) Nobody gets badges and pins, much less the coveted Eagle scarf and pin, without working hard for them, a powerful antidote to the "everybody gets a trophy for showing up" mentality. It was a good reminder that true self-esteem and confidence don't come by speaking feel-good affirmations into a mirror; they are earned the hard way by accepting a challenge and working through it to achieve a goal. But none of the boys who earned badges and

rank advancement did it on their own. It took cooperation with and encouragement from others to achieve these things. The men were teaching boys that “no man is an island,” that God intends for men to do life in community, learning to ask for and accept help from others even as they offer help to others.

In the midst of all this male-glory, I loved that each boy advancing in rank was called forward with his mother, given a pin to place on a ribbon worn over her heart, and directed to give her a hug. When one of the scoutmasters was honored for achieving a leadership rank that he had worked on for many months, his wife was asked to come to the platform to assist with the ceremony, and he asked for the whole family to come up. All nine children. In this troop, boy scouts are not just about boys and men. Their connections and commitments to family are also valued, another glory of godly masculinity.

At one point, one of the scout leaders was at the microphone calling scouts and their mothers forward. His own son and his wife, carrying a toddler boy, stood on stage to receive their pin. As soon as the toddler saw his daddy, he started jumping excitedly and reaching for his father with uncontainable joy and delight in his daddy, who took him into his arms with a big smile. Later, I told this leader something I heard recently from an experienced therapist who wrote *A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality*: even with boys on the emotionally sensitive, artistic, creative end of [the gender spectrum](#), the ones more at risk for taking a gay identity when they get older, if a little boy lights up and runs to his father when he comes home (or, as in this case, when he sees him unexpectedly), that boy is in a good, secure place emotionally. A warm and positive connection with his father is the best foundation for emotionally and gender-secure boys.

And that is one of the benefits of Boy Scouts for any boy, especially the fatherless or the badly fathered. When a boy receives attention, affirmation and affection ([the Three As](#)) from father-figures, he gets what he can only get from men,

and which he needs to grow up to manhood. Even if a boy's dad is not around, those needs can be met by other men who can introduce him to the world of men in safe, healthy, godly ways. (And that is why the idea of gay scout leaders is scary: men who lack gender security cannot impart to boys what they don't own. They are still looking to get their own need for the Three As met, and that unmet need can so easily turn into predation. Even if they don't intend that initially.)

The final highlight of the evening was the scoutmaster's comments and charge to each of the two Eagle recipients. His grasp of the meaning and application of God's word, combined with his personal knowledge and understanding of each young man's character and story, was one of the most excellent manifestations of a pastor-teacher I've ever seen. The newly-minted Eagles were blessed by a man soaring in his position and responsibility as a spiritual leader as he pointed them, not to himself, but to Christ, and urged them to follow hard after Him. This is what godly leadership looks like.

I have long seen that women cannot imprint masculinity on a boy's heart; we can confirm it, we can affirm it, we can clap and cheer for it, but we cannot imprint it. We don't have what it takes, because God gives *men* that privilege.

And I am so, so glad He does.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/boy_scouts_lets_hear_it_for_masculinity on May 6, 2014.